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STALAG LUFT III: AN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE
IN A WORLD WAR II
GERMAN PRISONER OF WAR CAMP

Volume I

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by
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ABSTRACT

The treatment Germany accorded prisoners of war in World War II was far from uniform. It is generally conceded that prisoners from the Eastern European countries and the Soviet Union received harsher treatment than those from the West. And it has often been asserted that the Germans treated officer prisoners better than captives from the enlisted ranks and that downed airmen received better treatment than their army counterparts. Statements to the effect that certain groups of prisoners were given relatively better or worse treatment than other groups do not tell us all we might wish to know about Germany's conduct toward prisoners of war in World War II. Nor do such statements reveal much about the prisoners themselves and how their conduct might have affected the situation. One way to gain a more precise knowledge of these matters is to conduct detailed studies of the camps in which the prisoners were detained. Until now this has not been done. This dissertation is designed to fill a part of that gap.

The subject of this study is Stalag Luft III, a German prisoner of war camp situated in Silesia. The Germans opened the camp in April 1942 and eventually placed ten thousand American, British, and Dominion airmen within its six compounds.

The evidence clearly reveals that Germany sought to abide by the provisions of the Geneva Convention of 1929 in regard to the care

it provided to this particular group of prisoners. The consensus of observers who visited numerous prisoner of war camps was that Stalag Luft III was in fact one of the best, if not the best, camp in Germany. The fact that the Luftwaffe personnel who administered and guarded the camp sought to uphold the provisions of the Geneva Convention meant that the prisoners housed in Stalag Luft III were spared much of the grief encountered by prisoners held by the Gestapo and SS, neither of which seem to have paid much heed to the provisions of the Convention.

The prisoners in Stalag Luft III nevertheless suffered much. The daily rations provided by the Germans were inadequate, the barracks in which the prisoners lived were cold and drafty, adequate sanitation facilities were lacking, and the prisoners lived in fear of trigger-happy guards and the threat of an SS or Gestapo take over of the camp.

Fortunately, the prisoners were able to do a great deal to help themselves. They were an elite group in that they possessed the physical and mental attributes required by the rigorous demands of flying. Most of the men had developed certain technical and professional skills prior to capture. They also discovered within their ranks capable and experienced leaders who were able to bring out in the prisoners a strong sense of community spirit which helped the prisoners gain maximum use from the limited supplies they obtained from the Germans, the Y.M.C.A., and the International Red Cross. Much of their attention and effort was directed toward intelligence and escape work, but records also reflect remarkable recreational,

educational, and religious programs and achievements.

Basic German cooperation, plus hard work by imaginative and talented prisoners resulted in a kaleidoscope of activity in Stalag Luft III that reveals much about both the Germans and the prisoners. In the final analysis, however, many more studies such as this will have to be completed before anything approaching a thorough knowledge of Germany's conduct toward prisoners of war in World War II can be attained and evaluated in light of the conduct of the prisoners themselves.

PREFACE

Stalag Luft III was a prisoner of war camp established in Silesia (now Poland) by the German Luftwaffe during World War II to hold captured American, British, and Dominion Air Force officers. Approximately seven thousand American prisoners passed through the gates of Stalag Luft III before it was evacuated on January 27, 1945. It is difficult for anyone who was not among their numbers to appreciate what the prisoners experienced during their stay there, but understanding is important, for their daily activities comprise a record of the things of which the history of man at war is made. The minutiae of daily living, the boredom of an unending routine, the trying efforts to retain hope and maintain discipline, the search for the higher things in life, the constant reminders that they were at the mercy of their enemy, the tension of knowing they were duty bound to circumvent and frustrate that same enemy—these are but a few of the things which filled the time and the minds of the men housed in Stalag Luft III.

The story of how these conditions affected the prisoners and how they responded to the challenges confronting them evokes in the present day observer a variety of feelings. At times we are disturbed at the seemingly uncivilized conduct of both the prisoners and their captors; but we must ask how we might have conducted ourselves in similar circumstances. Frequently, we find the story inspiring and wonder if we would have acted as nobly or bravely in like situations.

Sometimes we become depressed when we realize the manner in which sheer boredom and frustration laid its oppressive hand upon the prisoners. And yet, at other times, we are struck by the high sense of drama and excitement that prevailed in the camp. All these responses suggest one thing; the experiences of the men in Stalag Luft III deserve a place in the annals of American history. In view of this situation, it is surprising to learn that until now no comprehensive and documentary history of Stalag Luft III has existed. It is the purpose of this dissertation to fill that void.

It is not an easy story to tell. First of all, much controversy has arisen concerning conditions in the camp and the kind of treatment the Germans accorded the prisoners. Some observers have referred to Stalag Luft III as the country club of the German prison camps. Others resent this label and contend that the Germans should be condemned for the ill-treatment and abuse, not to mention the outright mass murder, they inflicted upon the unfortunate inmates of the camp. Movies, novels, and fragmentary historical accounts have added weight to the arguments presented on both sides of the controversy.

Second, the information needed to reconcile these conflicting views is not readily available. Much of it can only be found abroad, this being especially true of those items which reveal the activities of the British and Commonwealth prisoners as well as those of the Germans. Furthermore, many pertinent records were either destroyed or left behind when the prisoners from Stalag Luft III made a forced march westward in late January 1945. All documents and administrative papers from West Compound, for example, were buried in the ground inside the camp (where they presumably may still be found) to keep them from

falling into the hands of the Germans. In addition, the need to maintain internal security dictated that accounts of certain activities be left unwritten. Furthermore, certain secret items and methods of operation that are still used by prisoners today must remain undisclosed. And understandably, the passage of time has dimmed the memories of many of those who were directly involved in the activities in question. Finally, a certain amount of sifting is required to discover whatever truth there might be in the many stereotyped versions of what life was like in German prisoner of war camps in general and Stalag Luft III in particular. This last difficulty is perhaps the one hardest to overcome, for stereotypes have a way of persevering long after they have been exposed. And some very pernicious ones have arisen regarding life in German prison camps.

Most people realize that the television production "Hogan's Heroes" is a farcial portrayal of life in German prisoner of war camps. Enough depictions along this line have emerged, however, to create in the public mind a lingering suspicion that American prisoners of war in Germany did not live according to the manner usually associated with captivity behind the enemy's lines. The novels discussed in this study reveal a somewhat more convincing picture of what life behind barbed wire in Germany must have been like. However, they add to the confusion, if only because they fail to provide a means by which the reader can distinguish the facts which underlie these accounts from the fiction which embellishes them.

Even some of the accounts which are historically accurate have contributed to the prevailing misconceptions about the way of life shared by the prisoners of Stalag Luft III. The movie "The Great

Escape," starring Steve McQueen and Richard Attenborough, provides a case in point. Because theater audiences are unable to assimilate information about too many characters during the brief time allotted to a movie, the script writers of this film felt compelled to limit the number of individuals in the cast. The gist of the episode was retained, but only by resorting to the use of "composite" characters (combining the feats of several or many people into one dramatic role). In real life the circumstances surrounding the escape were dramatic enough to appear incredible. The use of composite characters makes them appear even more so. Many, if not most, people who saw the film understandably concluded that the events portrayed in the movie were simply too fantastic to be true. The movie fascinated most audiences but it was viewed with great skepticism. The general public had no way of knowing how much of what had been shown could be accepted as a true representation of what had transpired at Stalag Luft III.

Audiences might have given the movie more credence if they had been more familiar with some of the excellent and accurate accounts in existence depicting both the escape and other aspects of life in the camp. With only one exception, however, these accounts have not enjoyed wide circulation or notice. The one exception is the book upon which the movie "The Great Escape" was based. Paul Brickhill's The Great Escape (1950) is a masterful historical narrative. A personal witness to the entire episode, he supplemented his detailed knowledge with meticulous research and produced what will undoubtedly remain the definitive account of one of the most notable achievements of World War II.

The other accurate accounts of the escape and life in general

in Stalag Luft III have received very little attention. They include several biographical accounts of individuals who held important positions or otherwise drew attention to themselves either before, after, or while in Stalag Luft III; a few excellent memoirs and privately published historical accounts, fascinating in themselves, but too limited in scope to attract wide attention; and a number of official reports written during and after the war, highly informative and well documented, but seldom read because of the stilted style in which they were necessarily written and the restrictions placed upon their circulation by security classifications.

This work is intended to be a serious study of what life was like in Stalag Luft III. It attempts to separate fact from fiction and to correct some of the inaccurate impressions currently held about life in that camp. The information presented here has not been embellished for popular consumption and it is unrestricted by security classifications. All of this is possible largely because of the propitious time in which this project was undertaken.

Now is an opportune time to write such a history. First and foremost, the recent American experience in Vietnam has alerted us to the continuing controversies surrounding the care of prisoners of war. Our sense of outrage at the inhumane treatment accorded certain segments of the prisoner population has once again raised questions concerning mankind's failure to live up to civilized standards in such matters. These events have given rise to curiosity about the treatment afforded prisoners in the past. In this sense, the ensuing discussion of conditions in Stalag Luft III can enhance our perspective of recent developments in prisoner of war affairs.

In addition to the currency of the questions it addresses, the timing of this study is fortunate in other ways. We are now sufficiently removed from the events in question to ensure that perspective that only the passage of time can give. At the same time, we are not so far removed as to preclude consultation with some of the men who personally experienced life in Stalag Luft III. It was indeed a fortunate circumstance that the year devoted to researching this topic coincided exactly with the thirtieth anniversary of the camp's liberation. The occasion was celebrated here and abroad, and pleas for information at these gatherings produced gratifying results. In addition to these data, much of which have come to light for the first time, important documentary sources were utilized which have only recently been declassified, many of them upon the author's request.

Unfortunately, certain primary sources remained out of reach, and the scope of the study had to be tailored accordingly. The original design called for inclusion of all segments of the prisoner population, including British and Dominion personnel, as well as a full account of the actions taken by the Germans who operated Stalag Luft III. As already mentioned, however, most of the materials relating to the British, Dominion, and German roles are not available in this country. To cover their participation in the history of that camp adequately, extended research would have to be conducted in several foreign countries, including, but not limited to, Canada, England, Germany, Sweden, and Switzerland.

One other consideration figured in the decision to limit the scope of this study. The Americans eventually occupied three of the six compounds in Stalag Luft III (Center, South, and West), and the

account of their activities alone comprises a bulky work. It would have been an ambitious project, indeed, that attempted an equally detailed study of all six compounds at one time, and also the German side of the story. As it stands, then, this study expresses mainly an American view of life in Stalag Luft III and is based primarily upon the American experience in Center, South, and West Compounds.

Within these limitations, however, the study is designed to provide an authentic account of life and conditions in Stalag Luft III. Such an account requires an emphasis upon the mundane as well as the more sensational happenings for two reasons: First, the more glamorous events have already been widely publicized, the best example being escape activities which have been the subject of numerous studies. Second, prison life, by its very nature, involves prescribed routines and practices which understandably appear mundane. These activities had to be recaptured to the fullest possible extent, however, in order to gain insights into the actual conditions encountered by those imprisoned in Stalag Luft III. Accordingly, this study describes and analyzes the drudgery involved in the daily struggle to maintain military discipline, a suitable diet, adequate sanitation, and an acceptable state of morale. It does not overlook, however, the more elevating and exciting side of camp life depicted in religious, recreational, and educational activities and the venture-some but deadly serious intelligence and escape efforts.

All these subjects are in themselves worthy of detailed study. A full appreciation of their meaning and significance, however, can best be gained by viewing them in the broadest possible context, by comparing and contrasting them with similar cases that have arisen

throughout the history of prisoner of war affairs. Chapters I and II are devoted to a survey of the history of prisoner of war affairs in both world and American history. Here emphasis is placed upon the philosophical positions which governed the legalities of prisoner of war affairs down through the centuries. At various junctures, special notice is taken of how well the practices of the day coincided with the theories and laws considered acceptable at the time. The main objective here is to set the stage for a judicious assessment of Germany's performance in the treatment of prisoners of war in comparison with the record that had thus far been established. All this is requisite to our gaining an accurate and proper appreciation of the experiences of American prisoners in Stalag Luft III.

CHAPTER I

THE HISTORY OF PRISONER OF WAR AFFAIRS FROM ANCIENT TIMES TO THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Introduction

Down through the ages prisoners of war have been exposed to a variety of fates, each reflecting the standards of the society holding them captive, these standards in turn exhibiting as many variations as civilization itself. Amid the mixture of practices, however, one can observe certain notable events or trends which reveal the sources of recent prisoner of war policies and practices around the world. It is therefore deemed appropriate that the first two chapters of this dissertation be devoted to a survey of the history of prisoner of war affairs in an effort to acquire an understanding of the basis for the beliefs and attitudes toward prisoners of war that exist in modern times. Chapter I discusses the factors which determined the fate of prisoners of war from ancient times to the eve of the American Civil War. In recognition of the vast changes brought about by the advent of total war in modern times, a separate and second chapter completes the survey from the Civil War to the present, the Civil War representing the first of the modern wars which brought in their wake a host of new problems for the prisoner of war.

Ancient Times

The oldest branch of international law consisted of efforts to

establish rules for the conduct of warfare.¹ It should not surprise us to learn that the treatment accorded prisoners of war was of major concern to those who sought to establish the rules of war. It is surprising, however, to learn how much time elapsed before anything approaching modern concepts regarding the treatment of prisoners of war appeared.

Some scholars believe that in the early years of recorded time the concept of the "prisoner of war" was completely unknown.² Among ancient peoples, they claim, a tribal mentality prevailed and dictated harsh treatment and almost certain death for anyone who was captured by the enemy. The usual explanation for such harsh treatment is that " . . . the ancient world had not grasped the fundamental notions of the law of nations; that it had no regard for man as man" [emphasis added].³ At least as early as Greek and Roman times, however, a form of international law had developed. By this time the ancients:

were by no means entirely indifferent to the
moral obligations of justice and humanity

¹T. E. Holland, Studies in International Law (n.p., 1898), 45, cited in Joseph L. Kunz, "The Chaotic Status of the Laws of War and the Urgent Necessity for Their Revision," American Journal of International Law, 45 (January 1951), 38, n. 2. Hereinafter cited as "The Chaotic Status of the Laws of War."

²Howard S. Levie, "Penal Sanctions for Maltreatment of Prisoners of War," American Journal of International Law, 56 (April 1962), 433. Hereinafter cited as "Penal Sanctions."

³G. F. de Martens, Precis du droit des gens moderne, ed. C. Verge (Paris: 1864), I, quoted in Robert F. Grady, "The Evolution of Ethical and Legal Concern for the Prisoner of War" (doctoral dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 1971), 2. Hereinafter cited as "Ethical and Legal Concern."

between peoples; . . . they were not regardless
of the elementary rights of the individual⁴

Robert F. Grady has conducted an excellent study of the development of ethical and legal concern for the prisoner of war (see n. 3), and finds himself in agreement with this conclusion. He suggests that ancient peoples were able to sense, at times, ". . . some common bond other than tribal, political, or religious kinship."⁵ With the appearance of the Greek city-states within a common culture and a shared language, the stage was set for moving beyond a strict tribal mentality. Genuine cosmopolitanism surged ahead with the conquests of Alexander the Great, whose program was the first to essay the unification of a large area of the known world. And the unity attained by the Roman Empire greatly advanced this trend in human affairs.⁶

This growing sense of oneness among men led to efforts to restrain the evils of warfare. One of the elements of warfare discussed by philosophers was the proper disposition of prisoners of war. Whatever their expectations, Grady tells us, the plight of prisoners of war during ancient times was, by any standard, desperate. It was universally conceded that the captor held full dominion over his captive, and that if the captive was spared anything, including his life, it was only through a sense of pure generosity on the captor's part. Those fortunate enough to escape execution remained the property of

⁴Coleman Phillipson, The International Law and Custom of Ancient Greece and Rome (London: Macmillan and Co., 1911), 44, quoted in Grady, "Ethical and Legal Concern," 2-3.

⁵Grady, "Ethical and Legal Concern," 3.

⁶Ibid., 3-16.

the captor. They were frequently branded and used as slaves or were sold into slavery. These options were exercised by the captor without any compunction whatever; indeed, his actions were very much in keeping with the dictates of the law.⁷

Prisoners could also be disposed of in other ways. Sometimes they were released without any penalty whatever being levied against them, and sometimes they were released upon the payment of ransom. The practices of granting paroles and arranging for the exchanges of prisoners were also known during ancient times. The parole granted at that time did not always resemble the form of parole we are familiar with today. It seems that sometimes parole merely meant that a prisoner would be released upon his word that a ransom would be paid after the safe return to his homeland.⁸ It could also involve, as it most frequently does today, instances where a prisoner is given certain freedoms in return for his word that he will not use them to facilitate escape.⁹ The matter of exchanges is clearly enough described in the term itself as to require no further explanation.

Before concluding this discussion of the treatment of prisoners of war in ancient times, some note should be taken of two features of Roman law which called for slightly different forms of treatment than those already mentioned. Throughout their history, the Romans continued to think of prisoners taken in war as the property of the conqueror. But Roman rule encouraged that they be given preferential

⁷Ibid., 4-7, 11-13.

⁸Ibid., 14, 19.

⁹Herbert C. Fooks, Prisoners of War (Federalburg, Maryland: The J. W. Stowell Printing Co., 1924), 205-06.

treatment under certain circumstances. Rome's interest in conciliating her conquered subjects and winning their allegiance led to better treatment for many prisoners, especially those who surrendered voluntarily. Furthermore, if the prisoners were considered to be "civilized," the treatment accorded them would usually be better than that given "barbarians," the latter not even being thought of as people.¹⁰ This distinction between the care provided civilized prisoners versus that reserved for barbarians has manifested itself in various forms throughout the history of prisoner of war affairs and we shall have occasion to see how it was used to rationalize cruel and inhumane treatment of some prisoners by Germany in World War II.

By the dawning of the Christian era, then, a few of the primordial harbingers of the modern concepts of proper treatment of prisoners of war had surfaced. But little more than that can be said for ancient practices and attitudes toward war prisoners. The unfortunate captive was viewed solely as private property and could be disposed of by the imposition of death, being sold into slavery, ransomed for money, returned home via parole or exchange, or given outright freedom by a generous captor; the latter three—parole, exchange, and unqualified freedom—occurring only rarely.

Little change occurred during the early Christian era. Over the centuries, however, the influence of Christian theology served to encourage more humane treatment of prisoners of war, as did the concept of chivalrous warfare associated with knighthood, and the philosophies and laws that emerged during the Ages of Enlightenment and Reason.

¹⁰Grady, "Ethical and Legal Concern," 16, 19.

Together these influences created an atmosphere in which entirely new concepts could and did evolve.

The Christian Era

Two contrasting features characterized Christian beliefs and practices regarding prisoners of war: the sense of charity and love for members of the Christian brotherhood which has always been a major objective of the Christian community; and attachment to the concept of the Holy War derived from Jewish beliefs and customs.

It is well known that wars involving religion can be the most inhumane of all. In antiquity, holy wars were the rule rather than the exception. Begun by the command of the gods, their progress was directed by omens and their successful conclusion ensured by sacrifices to the gods. But until the advent of the covenant between God and the people of Israel, the religious overtones in war were something accessory. After the covenant, however, Israel's wars were invested with a sacred character. The inspiration for the change came from a command of Yahweh:

When the Lord, your God, brings you into the land which you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you . . . seven nations greater and mightier than yourselves, and when the Lord your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them; then you must utterly destroy them; you shall make no covenant with them, and show no mercy to them¹¹

As Grady points out, the wars of the Israelites seldom matched the ferocity implied by this passage. In fact, he asserts, prisoners were frequently taken and were usually treated with relative kindness.

¹¹"Deuteronomy" 7:1-3, Bible (Revised Standard Version).

Those who were enslaved enjoyed better treatment than their counterparts in other lands, and at times the captives "were treated with great condescension."¹²

The significance of this heritage for Christianity lies not so much in Jewish practice as it does in the tendency of later generations to find theological justification for barbaric conduct toward non-Christians, and in some cases, even against fellow Christians holding to slightly different persuasions. This spirit was most vividly exhibited in the Crusades of the middle ages¹³ and the notorious inquisitions of post-reformation Europe. As late as the seventeenth century, Christian leaders urged that religious wars "be fought with fervor in the name of the Lord God of hosts, and the more holy the cause the less restrained would be the means."¹⁴ And since "no consideration could be paid to humanity when the honor of God was at stake," the fate of war prisoners was not an enviable one.¹⁵

Offsetting these attitudes in the Christian world was a more humanitarian instinct which mitigated the tendency toward harshness. Fundamentally it was sparked by the philosophy of brotherly love around which Christianity was formed. Although few Christians have lived up to the dictum "love thy enemy" to the extent many feel they should, there is abundant evidence that Christian doctrines and

¹²Grady, "Ethical and Legal Concern," 39, 41-42.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴The words are attributed to Calvin by Roland H. Bainton, Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace (New York-Nashville: Abindgon Press, 1960), 145, quoted in Grady, "Ethical and Legal Concern," 43.

¹⁵Grady, "Ethical and Legal Concern," 43.

practices in time served to improve both the status and treatment afforded prisoners of war. For example, early Christians exhibited a sense of concern regarding the welfare of prisoners of war in the hands of the heathens. When they realized that large numbers of them could be brought back into the Christian fold by the payment of ransom, a major drive commenced to obtain funds for the ransom fees. St. Ambrose expressed the Church's viewpoint when he stated that "it is especially noble to redeem captives, particularly from the barbarous enemy who shows no humanity for mercy's sake, but only what avarice promotes him to accord in view of the ransom money."¹⁶ Grady asserts that by the seventh century "the ransoming of captives by the Church was a well-established, time-honored practice of the corporal works of mercy."¹⁷

A more significant development in Christian thinking regarding prisoners of war resulted from the adoption of St. Augustine's "Just War" theory. In short, just as "necessity leads us to slay an enemy who shows fight, . . . so the vanquished or the captive is entitled to mercy."¹⁸ The mercy shown was not very remarkable by present day standards. It proscribed the killing of prisoners but still permitted their being sold into slavery or held for ransom. It did, however, lend valuable support to a principle which was gradually becoming important in the budding field of international law; that punishment meted out to prisoners of war must never exceed that which is absolutely

¹⁶St. Ambrose, Di Officiis Ministrorum 2:28:140 (PL. 16), quoted in Grady, "Ethical and Legal Concern," 32.

¹⁷Grady, "Ethical and Legal Concern," 36.

¹⁸Quoted in Alberico Gentili, De Iure Belli Libri Tres, trans. John C. Rolfe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), 210-11, and quoted in Grady, "Ethical and Legal Concern." 44.

necessary for the safety of the state.

Franciscus de Victoria was among the first systematic writers on international law, and in the work he completed around the turn of the sixteenth century, one can see evidence of the application of the principle that prisoners were not to be subjected to unnecessarily harsh treatment. He advanced two cardinal principles for evaluating the legality of any warlike act: first, that it is illegal to do greater harm than the attainment of the war objective warrants, and second, that it is illegal to injure those innocent of taking active part in the hostilities, except where there is no other way of carrying on the war. From this followed the principle that the slaughter of captives was no longer warranted since that act was not necessary to attain victory.¹⁹ The fruition of the just war theory is clearly revealed here.

The next major improvement in the lot of the prisoner of war was marked by the release without ransom of the prisoners captured in the Thirty Years War. With notable exceptions, this can be designated as the juncture in the history of prisoner of war affairs after which the practice of enslaving captives declined rapidly.²⁰

The Age of Reason

Another two centuries passed before the philosophies underlying the increasingly more favorable treatment came to light in the works of Montesquieu and Rousseau.

¹⁹William E. S. Flory, Prisoners of War: A Study in the Development of International Law (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 1942), 13-14. Hereinafter cited as Prisoners of War.

²⁰Ibid., 15.

In 1748 Montesquieu, in his famous L'Espirít des Lois, enunciated his belief that war gave no other right over prisoners than that of preventing them from doing further harm by securing their persons, since all nations had concurred in detesting the destruction of prisoners in cold blood. Furthermore, he declared, this position was in keeping with the general principle expressed in international law that the various nations must do each other the greatest good during peace time and, during war, the least possible harm without injury to their true interests.²¹

Rousseau soon added to the momentum in favor of leniency by declaring in 1762 that he conceived of war as in no way being a struggle between man and man, but rather as one between states in which individuals are enemies only by accident, not as men, or even as citizens, but merely as soldiers. As William Flory summarizes Rousseau's concept,

No state could have anything but other states for enemies, not men. The aim of war being the destruction of the enemy state, the right to kill its soldiers exists so long as they are armed, but as soon as they surrender, ceasing to be instruments of the enemy, they become once again ordinary men.²²

This realization, in the author's estimation, marks the greatest single development in the history of prisoner of war affairs. Its significance lies not in the restriction on the taking of the prisoner's life, for as we have already seen, that had been generally conceded for some time before Rousseau's pronouncement. Far more significant was the

²¹Ibid., 15.

²²Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Du Contract Social ou Principes du Droit Politique (1762), as summarized in Ibid., 16.

claim that a state could have only other states, and not mere men, as enemies, and that once the soldiers fighting on behalf of an enemy state were disarmed they immediately reverted to their status as ordinary men. This line of reasoning encouraged the adoption of entirely new attitudes and laws regarding the treatment of prisoners of war. The legislative assemblies in France, for example, translated these theories into law by declaring in 1792 that prisoners of war would no longer be considered the property of the individual captor, but would henceforth be given over to the care and protection of the nation.²³ In addition, the way was now paved for more forthright efforts to apply humanitarian principles to the treatment of prisoners of war.

As mentioned earlier, certain segments of the prisoner of war population have received humanitarian care since ancient times. It was not until the eighteenth century, however, that such care was sought for all prisoners. And even from that time until the present, humanitarian care has often been most conspicuous by its absence. Why did this development come so late in history, and why have the appeals for humanitarian treatment so often gone unheeded? At least seven contributing factors can be identified: 1) the persistence of doubt concerning the very idea of mitigating the destructive forces of war, 2) disagreement over who qualifies as a prisoner of war, 3) the absence, until recently, of a clear definition of what constitutes humane treatment for prisoners of war, 4) the difficulty of striking a proper balance between humanitarian pursuits and military necessity, 5) the decision by some societies to place themselves above the law,

²³Fooks, Prisoners of War, 12.

6) the absence of effective sanctions to be used against those who do violate the laws of war, and 7) the assignment of untrained or unsympathetic personnel to prison camp duties. These philosophical and practical issues deserve a closer look.

The Observance of Humanitarian Principles

On behalf of those who express skepticism about the concept of granting humanitarian care to the captured enemy during times of war, it must be conceded that at first glance there does seem to be something inherently contradictory and hypocritical about the entire notion. The concept is as difficult to grasp as the one which attempts to reconcile the adoption of rules or laws to warfare itself. As one observer has noted:

At first sight law and war are terms which negate each other. Law generally implies an orderly polity where human relationship and behavior are governed by inescapable rules War, on the other hand, appears to connote the abandonment of the restraint of rules of behavior in international intercourse, by substituting in their place reliance on brute force. No judicial consideration of rights and wrongs resolves the issue between warring nations. That is decided by might alone What, therefore, has law to do with war, and war with law?²⁴

The answer is that, while warfare has always been a vicious and destructive endeavor, and has become even more so with the invention of still more deadly weapons, the fact remains that over the years man has come to realize that there are definite advantages to placing some restraints upon the conduct of war. For example, the practice of honoring

²⁴ Morris Greenspan, The Modern Law of Land Warfare (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959), 3.

a white flag as a means of communicating an intention to surrender or negotiate is recognized as being beneficial to all parties. The fact that the rules governing its use and sanctity are often violated does not diminish its standing in law or the respect generally accorded it among combatants. The credence given to such matters in international law can be seen in the fact that prosecutions for war crimes antedated the Nuremberg Trials by at least five centuries.²⁵

In a sense the same may be said by way of justifying the observance of humanitarian principles during warfare. The possibility of reprisals against a nation's own soldiers being held captive by the enemy is reason enough to provide adequate treatment for the prisoners it has under its control. But the rationale for observing humanitarian principles extends beyond that. Most people agree that it is simply the proper thing to do since fellow human beings are involved. The fact that these prisoners once attempted to do harm to the men who now hold them captive is not the major consideration at such times. Knowledge of the ways in which war is conducted helps the captor overcome at least some of the ill-feelings he might harbor in this regard.

The question of who qualifies as a prisoner of war is a very complex one. Jurists have struggled for years to ascertain the proper status of various combatants. Uniformed soldiers captured with their units generally pose no problem and are readily given the status of prisoners of war. But commandos, guerrillas, insurrectionists, parachutists, and soldiers temporarily out of uniform are all susceptible to being treated as rebels, spies, or saboteurs rather than as war

²⁵Ibid., 4.

prisoners. More will be said about the status of such combatants in succeeding pages.

Once a soldier had been classified as a prisoner of war, he was, at least after the middle of the eighteenth century, entitled to humane treatment. But until recently, no clear definition existed of what constituted humane treatment. Not until the first quarter of the twentieth century did a document appear which went beyond the statement of general principles in more than a smattering of categories and outline specific standards which were to serve thereafter as a measure of humane treatment. This advance occurred in 1929 when the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War was successfully concluded. More will be said about the 1929 Geneva Convention and its predecessors in the pages below.

Until such a definition appeared, and to a certain extent even afterwards as evidenced by the need for further revisions of the articles of the Convention, officials in charge of prisoners of war had to make their own judgments of what constituted humane treatment. Opinions varied widely. And then, as now, a balance had to be struck between humanitarian interests and military necessity whenever the two came into conflict. It is not always possible to remove prisoners from combat zones or provide them sufficient rations. In times of serious crises, civilian populations often suffer grievously. No captor can long afford to treat his captives better than any major segment of the population. Charges of coddling arise quickly when it appears prisoners are being treated too well. When the general population is on the brink of starvation, "coddling" can sometimes be ascribed to an act as essential as sharing subsistence rations with the prisoners.

In the search for suitable standards under such circumstances, each case must be judged on its individual merits. For instance, as war draws to a close, the prisoners held captive by the losing side often face starvation along with the general citizenry. Reason suggests that the detaining power has no right to continue its prosecution of the war after conditions reach that stage. This is the position taken in international law today. The court at Nuremberg rejected the claim that wanton suffering could be imposed upon people in the face of the crisis situation confronting any nation in the final phases of a war. The decision read in part:

It is an essence of war that one or the other side must lose and the experienced generals and statesmen knew this when they drafted the rules and customs of land warfare. In short these rules and customs of land warfare are designed specifically for all phases of war.

They comprise the law for such emergency. To claim that they can be wantonly—and at the sole discretion of any one belligerent—disregarded when he considers his own situation to be critical, means nothing more or less than to abrogate the laws and customs of war entirely.²⁶

Questions of judgment and balance are involved here. When does humane treatment become synonymous with coddling? Or conversely, at what point does a plight enforced upon everyone because of the dictates of military necessity render humane treatment impossible? The difficulty in answering these questions explains in large part why

²⁶Krupp trial, Annual Digest and Reports of Public International Law Cases, 1948, no. 214,628, quoted in Lothar Kotzsch, The Concept of War in Contemporary History and International Law (Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1956), 119-20. Kotzsch goes on to point out that: "Besides military necessity which States are prevented from invoking on grounds of State emergency, there remains the genuine concept of tactical military necessity as a plight of a single military unit. Tactical military necessity which prevails in the fight of a military unit cannot be explained in a general way because of its being individually settled with regard to each of the rules of warfare." Ibid., 120.

demands for humanitarian treatment came late in history and why they are not always observed even today. Civilization had to be well advanced before these questions could be adequately addressed. And the absence prior to the eighteenth century of clear pronouncements such as those made by Montesquieu and Rousseau suggests that only in recent times has mankind achieved the required level of civilization. Conversely, to the extent that such considerations have been given short shrift since the eighteenth century, to that extent one must question modern man's claims to being civilized.

It is in this connection that the fifth factor listed above comes to our attention. What is to be said for societies which overtly or covertly reject humanitarian principles outright? In passing judgment upon those who do so, consideration must be given to the cultural and historical milieu within which the decision was made to reject such standards. Although it is difficult for most westerners to accept ill-treatment of prisoners of war in any form, it is easier for Americans to comprehend why the Asiatics conducted themselves as they did in World War II (since we now recognize that they had historically held different conceptions regarding prisoners of war), than it is for us to comprehend the actions of the Germans, who had openly proclaimed and accepted western standards as outlined in international law. Germany's conduct is a clear example of a nation placing itself above the law. Such conduct is usually undertaken in the name of some cause more highly valued than the interests of humanity itself, or at least than the interests of certain segments of humanity. In this sense, their actions are reminiscent of those associated with holy wars. Holy wars, whether inspired by devotion to god, state, or

ideology, are no longer recognized in international law. Nevertheless, few effective sanctions exist for use against those peoples who undertake holy wars or otherwise place themselves above the law.

The absence of sanctions comprises the sixth factor responsible for undermining man's efforts to accord humane treatment to prisoners of war. It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss the reasons that adequate sanctions have not been provided to enforce the law against those who treat prisoners inhumanely.²⁷ It is sufficient to point out here that the search for effective sanctions against violations of all the rules of war has been going on for centuries without any adequate solution having been found to date. We should, therefore, find it easy to sympathize with those who failed in the past to impose effective sanctions in cases where prisoners of war received something less than humane treatment.

The seventh and final explanation for the absence of humanitarian care long after it has been called for in theory and law is associated with the practice of assigning untrained and unsympathetic personnel to prison camp duties. As one observer has noted:

Humane officers should be detailed for this duty,—men who by nature are kind and sympathetic to persons in unfortunate circumstances,—yet officers who have the necessary firmness of will, and strength of character to deal with prisoners of war who are unruly, disorderly, and who do not respond to kind treatment. There should be made a special effort before the outbreak of war, and during the continuance of

²⁷For excellent discussions of this matter, see Levie, "Penal Sanctions," 433-68, and Kunz, "The Chaotic Status of the Laws of War," 37-61.

hostilities to determine the characteristics of officers for assignment to duty with prisoners of war.²⁸

It appears that such care seldom was exercised in selecting camp personnel. All too often the personnel selected for prison camp duties were chosen on the basis of their unfitness for active combat due to wounds, old age, or other disabilities including pure and simple ineptitude. National policies calling for humane treatment often have been rendered ineffective by administrators who ignore or are ignorant of the most basic procedures and measures regarding the proper care of prisoners of war. In the final analysis, the individuals who have control of the immediate situation can do either great good or untold harm merely by the manner in which they execute their duties. The absence of adequate training for prison camp administrators usually dictates that the prisoners must suffer while the unskilled jailors learn their jobs. And when the camp personnel harbor feelings of hostility, evidence a lack of sympathy for the unfortunates placed in their care, approach their duties grudgingly because of a dislike for the job or a sense of frustration over their inability to continue as fighting men, or are otherwise unsuited for the task at hand, the prisoners can expect to derive little comfort from the best of laws.

It is interesting to note that the call for the observance of humanitarian practices in the treatment of prisoners of war was made prior to the first great war in American history. Theoretically, the prisoners taken during the American Revolution, and in every war thereafter, should have received humane treatment. And the number of times

²⁸Fooks, Prisoners of War, 174-75.

they did receive such treatment indicates that man had, by the end of the eighteenth century, reached a point of great sophistication in his appreciation of civilized standards. In those cases where the prisoners received ill-treatment, we have a right to ask why they were treated poorly. The answer can probably be found among the seven explanations discussed in this section.

As a word of caution, it must be emphasized that the record seldom speaks solely for one side or the other. When viewing real life situations, even with the benefit of hindsight, it is extremely difficult to judge right from wrong. This is certainly true regarding questions of possible ill-treatment of prisoners of war, where, as we have seen, it is frequently difficult to strike a proper balance between the need to respond to both humanitarian interests and military necessity. Allowing for the confusion and passion of war, it is easy to appreciate the need for controlling our sense of outrage as we continue our survey of the history of prisoner of war affairs, focusing now on the period from the American Revolution to the eve of the Civil War.

The American Revolution

The difficulty of determining right from wrong is clearly demonstrated in the American Revolution. To the colonists, it was a war of independence; to the British it was nothing less than rebellion. Americans were to gain a greater appreciation of the implications underlying such distinctions when the Civil War raised questions about the use of similar terminology.

The British position can be ascertained from a notation Captain Frederick Mackenzie, a member of the British Expeditionary Forces, made

in his journal in the autumn of 1775:

An exchange of prisoners is talked of. The measure may be right and polite; but it appears rather extraordinary that under the present circumstances we should treat with them as if on an equality Rebels taken in arms forfeit their lives by the laws of all countries²⁹

The British government itself adopted a policy of dealing with American prisoners as common malefactors and outlaws. Not until 1782 were Americans officially recognized by an act of Parliament as prisoners of war rather than traitors.³⁰

The fruits of such policies are easy to imagine. American prisoners were treated very harshly by the British, one report indicating that more American soldiers died aboard the infamous British prison ships than from British rifle fire.³¹ Captain William Cunningham, the British Provost Marshal in New York during the Revolution, confessed to the following crimes against American prisoners:

When the war commenced I was appointed Provost Marshal to the Royal Army, which placed me in a situation to wreak my vengeance on the Americans. I shudder to think of the murders I have been accessory to, both with and without orders from government, especially while in New York,

²⁹Frederick Mackenzie, Diary, ed. Allen French (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930), II:39, quoted in Grady, "Ethical and Legal Concern," 55.

³⁰Grady, "Ethical and Legal Concern," 55, n. 3, 56.

³¹Ibid., 57. For a brief but authoritative discussion of the statistics pertaining to the numbers of deaths among captives from the Revolutionary armies see Howard H. Peckham, ed., The Toll of Independence: Engagements & Battle Casualties of the American Revolution, Clements Library Bicentennial Studies (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 132. This source does not include figures that can be used to either confirm or deny the above claim, but it does strongly support the conclusion that fatalities among prisoners were outrageously high, an estimated 8500 captives having died out of the 18,182 men held by the British. Ibid., 130.

during which time there were more than 2000 prisoners starved in the different churches, by stopping their rations, which I sold. There were also 275 American prisoners and obnoxious persons executed, out of all which number there were only one dozen public executions, which chiefly consisted of British and Hessian deserters.³²

These policies and actions contrasted sharply with the humane treatment of British prisoners called for by the Continental Congress. On January 2, 1776, it declared that being a prisoner of war involved "a restraint of honor only" and sought to apply humanitarian concepts in its treatment of prisoners.³³ Continued mistreatment of American prisoners by the British caused Washington to lower the standards of treatment accorded British prisoners to a level similar to that rendered to the Americans.³⁴ At the same time, he appealed to the British to reconsider their position, at one point protesting:

I am sorry that I am again under the necessity of remonstrating with you upon the treatment which our prisoners continue to receive Those who have lately been sent out, give the most shocking accounts of their barbarous usage, which their miserable emaciated countenance confirm How very different was their appearance from that of your soldiers, who lately have been returned to you, after a captivity of twelve months I would beg that some certain rule of conduct towards prisoners may be settled: if you are determined to make captivity as distressing as possible, to those whose lot it is to fall into

³²Quoted in Fooks, Prisoners of War, 176.

³³George G. Lewis and John Mewha, History of Prisoner of War Utilization by the United States Army, 1776-1945 (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1955), 1. Hereinafter cited as Prisoner of War Utilization.

³⁴Ibid., 2.

it, let me know it, that we may be upon equal terms, for your conduct must and shall match mine.³⁵

It is easy to understand Washington's sense of frustration and irritation. The reports of prison camp conditions which evoked the above protest stated that in Philadelphia food shortages were so critical among prisoners that rats were considered a luxury and that starving prisoners scraped mortar and rotten wood from the walls and greedily ate it for the temporary sensation of nourishment is provided.³⁶ In the end, American threats of reprisal materialized in brutal fashion. In retaliation the Continental Congress ordered that all captured seamen be incarcerated aboard prison ships and be subjected to the same treatment meted out to American prisoners. Subsequently, hundreds of British sailors were reported to have died from privation and disease.³⁷ In the final analysis, it appears that a compromise was struck in the American Revolution. The British treated the American prisoners brutally, but not as brutally as was permissible under law in quelling domestic disturbances. The Americans, in turn, set out with good intentions but succumbed to the temptation to use reprisals as a means of securing better treatment for their own soldiers, a method frequently utilized even today but nevertheless quite unfair to the unsuspecting and innocent prisoners who are victimized in reprisal actions.

³⁵John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., Writings of Washington from the Original Manuscript Source (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1931), VII, 2-3, quoted in Grady, "Ethical and Legal Concern." 59.

³⁶Grady, "Ethical and Legal Concern," 59.

³⁷Ibid., 61.

The lessons learned in the Revolution were not lost on the Americans. In 1785 a treaty was drawn up between the United States and Prussia which represented one of the earliest formal agreements concerning the treatment of prisoners of war concluded by nations not at war with each other.³⁸ Expressions of all the new theories concerning the treatment of prisoners of war could be found in this treaty of commerce and friendship. The two contracting parties pledged that they would not send prisoners of war into distant and inclement countries, that they should not be confined in dungeons, prison ships, prisons, put in irons, or bound, or otherwise restrained in the use of their limbs.³⁹ It is generally conceded that this treaty

furnished the precedent that formally specified the duty of the captor toward its prisoners, and, as such, was the forerunner for the multilateral conventions among nations relative to the treatment accorded prisoners of war.⁴⁰

It was reenacted in 1799 and extended in 1828. Surprisingly, it served as the only mutually effective agreement between the United States and Germany relative to the treatment of prisoners of war during World War I.⁴¹

The War of 1812

Until recently little attention had been given to the treatment

³⁸Flory, Prisoners of War, 17.

³⁹Fooks, Prisoners of War, 11-12; "Treaty of Amity and Commerce between the United States and Prussia, 1785." William M. Malloy, ed., Treaties, Conventions, International Acts, Protocols and Agreements Between the United States of America and Other Powers (Washington, 1910-1938), II, 1484-85, 1494-95.

⁴⁰Lewis and Mewha, Prisoner of War Utilization, 21.

⁴¹Ibid., 21.

of prisoners of war in the War of 1812. One of the most highly respected authorities on the treatment of prisoners of war, William Flory, dismisses the entire matter in one sentence: "Probably prisoners of war, during the War of 1812, were satisfactorily treated, since the evidence to the contrary is extremely meager."⁴² Grady skips over the war entirely. Lewis and Mewha devote little over three pages to the subject. Though their account is good insofar as it goes, the first really adequate coverage of this topic seems to have awaited the efforts of Anthony George Dietz. His doctoral dissertation on prisoners of war in the War of 1812⁴³ is somewhat limited in scope since it covers primarily the treatment of British soldiers held by Americans, but it does discuss a heretofore neglected subject and brings to light important facts about the conditions that prevailed during that war.

There was one major difference between the American Revolution and the War of 1812 which affected the prisoners of war. In the latter war most American soldiers were no longer considered traitors and rebels by the British. The same could not be said for those unfortunates whom Britain impressed or otherwise attempted to gain control of under the guise of perpetual citizenship. Relatively speaking, however, their numbers were small and the problems that arose concerning them should not be allowed to obscure the more important fact that the War of 1812 represented one of the better eras in the history

⁴²Flory, Prisoners of War, 17.

⁴³Anthony George Dietz, "The Prisoner of War in the United States during the War of 1812" (doctoral dissertation, American University, 1964). Hereinafter cited as "The Prisoner in the War of 1812."

of prisoner of war affairs. This was mainly the result of the general acceptance by the United States and Great Britain of both the prevailing philosophies and the laws that governed prisoner of war affairs at that time. There were stipulations in the Cartel of 1813 that called for "prisoners to be subjects of humane treatment 'conformable to the usage and practice of the most civilized nations during war.'"⁴⁴ This in itself was no guarantee that the rights of the prisoners would be respected; but Dietz goes on to say that although the United States and England were not in complete accord during their conflict with respect to the manner in which prisoners were to be treated, both nations were "influenced by the value of a common heritage," and "had a high regard for law."⁴⁵ There were instances of brutality and mistreatment, and resort was made to reprisals in an effort to force the British to relinquish their practice of holding past English subjects to perpetual citizenship. But, in general, the prisoners in the War of 1812 fared remarkably well because of the similarity of views and practices between the United States and England at this time. Dietz concludes:

Their recognition of and general acceptance of the growing body of customs or rules which were applied to prisoners of war and their furtherance of the principles involved attest to this high regard and support the view that the two nations were, in a genuine sense, the servants of the rule of law.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Ibid., 376.

⁴⁵Ibid., 376, 379.

⁴⁶Ibid., 379.

As the years went by, the United States could boast of a consistently humane policy towards the treatment of prisoners of war. Although its good intentions had been largely frustrated during the American Revolution, its record in the War of 1812, as we have seen, was very good. The same can be said for the way it conducted itself in the Mexican War.

The Mexican War

Both sides were generally satisfied with the treatment afforded prisoners in the Mexican War. Large numbers of prisoners were taken by the American forces, but most were released on parole and permitted to return to their homes.⁴⁷ The Mexicans also treated the American prisoners well, as is evidenced by a statement made in 1847 by the Commander of the American Home Squadron referring to the "kind and liberal treatment" granted American prisoners in Mexico.⁴⁸

The philosophy which underlay the policies followed throughout these early years of nationhood was succinctly outlined by Daniel Webster in 1842 when he wrote:

Prisoners of war are to be considered as unfortunate and not as criminal, and are to be treated accordingly, although the question of detention or liberation is one affecting the interest of the captor alone, and therefore one with which no other government ought to interfere in any way; yet the right to detain by no means implies the right to dispose of the prisoners at the pleasure of the captor. That right involves certain duties, among them that

⁴⁷Lewis and Mewha, Prisoner of War Utilization, 25-26.

⁴⁸Commodore M. O. Perry to Don Manuel Baranda, Minister of Foreign Relations of Mexico, April 27, 1847, House Executive Docs., 30 Cong., 1 Sess., No. 60, Ser. No. 520, 983.

of providing the prisoners with the necessities of life and abstaining from the infliction of any punishment upon them which they may not have merited by an offense against the laws of the country since they were taken.⁴⁹

This philosophy governed American prisoner of war affairs during the latter years of our history as well. Beginning with the American Civil War, however, the advent of total war posed new problems for prisoners of war. This development, along with the continuing presence of the seven factors discussed earlier, served as a portent of the dim future facing prisoners of war. At the same time, the realities of modern war gave impetus to a reform movement which succeeded in either eliminating or significantly reducing the impact of a few of the limiting factors and at the same time opened the way for civilian efforts in mitigating the destructive forces of total war. The next chapter discusses these developments in detail and concludes the historical survey undertaken here by viewing prisoner of war affairs from the Civil War era to the present.

⁴⁹Francis Wharton, A Digest of the International Law of the United States (1886), III, 332, quoted in Flory, Prisoners of War, 17-19.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORY OF PRISONER OF WAR AFFAIRS FROM THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR TO THE PRESENT

Introduction

On the eve of the American Civil War, the United States could look back with pride upon the humane theories and practices that had governed its conduct toward prisoners of war during the previous half century. Its record was subsequently tarnished during the Civil and Indian Wars,¹ but otherwise has been maintained down to the present. This represents a remarkable achievement in view of the significant changes that have occurred in warfare since 1860, especially concerning man's increasing capacity in modern times to engage in total war.

Unfortunately, American soldiers who fell into enemy hands did not always benefit from policies as humane as those adhered to by the United States. This was primarily caused by two factors: First and foremost, the total war environment made itself more strongly felt abroad than in America. This, in turn, permitted the debilitating factors noted in the last chapter to reign more freely in the war zone.

¹This is the only reference that will be made to United States' prisoner of war policies in regard to the American Indian, due to the fact that the nature of those policies was quite unique and distinctly different from that which serves as the focal point of this study.

Still, with the exception of the treatment accorded Americans in Asiatic wars, prisoners from the United States forces fared better than most. The explanation for this fact would seem to be that the United States benefited from the success of a civilian reform movement that got underway in the West in the mid-nineteenth century which effectively mitigated many of the evils confronting prisoners of war in modern conflicts. The fact that these reforms bore fruit primarily in the European and American theaters accounts for the tragic suffering encountered in Asian conflicts.

Though the evil influences of total war on the lives of prisoners were mitigated, they were not entirely removed. This truth became evident during the two World Wars. And even in the post-World War era, when limited warfare again seemed to be in vogue, the tenacity of the evils total war holds for prisoners was evident. The American experience in Korea and Vietnam has shown that, though restraint was considered wise in the use of arms, it was not considered appropriate in the handling of prisoners. Americans held captive in these two wars suffered all the abuses and ill-treatment one would expect them to have encountered in a total war.

The American Civil War

Since the American Civil War represented one of the first of the modern or total wars, it provides a convenient introduction to the fate of prisoners in modern times. The record of humane treatment traditionally provided by the United States to prisoners of war was tainted during the American Civil War. There were two reasons for

this development; the uncertain status accorded Southern captives,² and the totality of the conflict.³

In 1861 the United States government found itself in a position similar to that occupied by the British in 1775. Having refused to admit the "right of secession," it could only look upon those who took up arms on behalf of the South as traitors or rebels. The terminology often applied to captives from the Confederacy reveals the attitudes of Northerners: Southern soldiers were called "insurgents," and privateers were designated "pirates." As Grady points out, "To the extent that this mentality prevailed, to that extent the opportunities for ameliorating the condition of prisoners of war remained remote."⁴

The South sought to gain proper recognition for its captured soldiers by threatening reprisals against Northern captives in the event Southern prisoners were imprisoned or executed as rebels and pirates. At first the threats from the South were ignored, but it became necessary to pay them full heed and respect as the Confederacy acquired large numbers of Northern captives. In time a series of arrangements were concluded by the North and South that called for the acceptance of paroles and exchanges.

These gains were largely offset, however, by the fact that the Civil War soon evolved into a form of total war, and once again the

²Robert F. Grady, "The Evolution of Ethical and Legal Concern for the Prisoner of War" (doctoral dissertation, the Catholic University of America, 1971), 66. Hereinafter cited as "Ethical and Legal Concern."

³Anthony George Dietz, "The Prisoner of War in the United States during the War of 1812" (doctoral dissertation, The American University, 1964), 379. Hereinafter cited as "The Prisoner of War in the War of 1812."

⁴Grady, "Ethical and Legal Concern," 66.

clash between military expediency and total involvement on the one hand and the concern for the rights and humane treatment of prisoners on the other came into focus.⁵ The results are generally well known. While there were instances of mutual respect and consideration for the needs of enemy captives,⁶ the overall conduct of the two sides composes a record most unworthy of that previously established in the United States. Sensational stories based on more or less true accounts of atrocities at camps such as Andersonville, Libby, and Belle Isle have frozen in the public mind vivid images of the horrors perpetrated by the South. Many complaints arose about conditions in the camps in the North also, and the evidence indicates that the Union permitted, and in some cases even fostered, ill-treatment of Southern prisoners, most often under the rubric of reprisals.

William B. Hesseltine, in his work on Civil War prisons,⁷ fully recognizes the existence of unsanitary conditions and inadequate diet in the Northern camps in 1861-1862, but concludes that in general the food issued to the prisoners was "of good quality,"⁸ and that "proper police of the prisons kept disease and death at a minimum."⁹ The same, he concluded, was true for the treatment given the prisoners held by

⁵Dietz, "The Prisoner of War in the War of 1812," 379.

⁶Herbert C. Fooks, Prisoners of War (Federalburg, Maryland: The J. W. Stowell Printing Co., 1924), 205-06.

⁷Civil War Prisons: A Study in War Psychology (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1930). Hereinafter cited as Civil War Prisons.

⁸Ibid., 45.

⁹Ibid., 54.

the South during the early years of the war. But the rapid influx of prisoners into the South, as well as the absence of adequate resources, quickly led to overcrowding and widespread privation. Hesseltine confirms the existence of intolerable conditions at Andersonville, but carefully outlines the factors contributing to the situation and assigns improper behavior by the camp's personnel as one of the least of these causes. He views the movement of the prisoners from camp to camp in an effort to find locations safe from Northern armies as but another manifestation of the South's desperate attempts to do the impossible near the end of the war, the implication being that the ill-treatment received during the moves was but one more consequence of the general collapse of the South.

In time the rumors of mistreatment of prisoners of war gained credence on both sides. People in the North especially came to feel that there was a "vindictive spirit" among the Confederates which starkly contrasted with the "excellent treatment" accorded to prisoners in the North.¹⁰ The inevitable reaction of the people of the North, Hesseltine notes, was to demand that the Southerners held in Northern prison camps be given similar treatment. Accordingly, rations were cut and further improvements in the Northern camps were curtailed.¹¹

The acute shortage of supplies as a major factor in Southern mistreatment of prisoners was only slightly recognized by the North, and so it is not surprising to find that in the aftermath of the war "the psychosis which had been engendered in the minds of the people

¹⁰Ibid., 175.

¹¹Ibid., 177ff.

during the conflict" led the nation to demand proper restitution from the responsible parties in the South.¹² Numerous accusations were made, but only three of the men charged with vindictive measures against the prisoners were ever brought to trial and only two of them were convicted.¹³ Nevertheless, the polemical nature of the entire controversy and the literature which nurtured it contributed to the poisonous atmosphere that lingered long after the war ended.

The psychosis Hesseltine describes is not uncommon in war. People often attribute the actions of their enemies to pure vindictiveness and reply in kind. Perhaps the total war environment encountered in the Civil War caused the psychosis to become more widespread and vitriolic than would normally be the case. If so, the danger posed both then and now by this phenomenon can be added to the many new factors that adversely affect the lives of prisoners whenever total war occurs. A list of these factors would include, but not be limited to, the following.

First, total war reaches deep into a nation's hinterland; under these circumstances, prisoners often find themselves in combat zones

¹²Ibid., 233.

¹³Captain Henry Wirz was tried, convicted, and sentenced to death by hanging for the cruel treatment and unlawful killing of prisoners of war who had been in his custody at Andersonville. (See William B. Hesseltine, Civil War Prisons, for evidence that the trial was in fact a sham.) One of Wirz' civilian employees, James W. Duncan, was tried for the same offense at Savannah in March, 1866, was convicted, and was sentenced to imprisonment at hard labor for fifteen years. Major John H. Gee was tried at Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1866 for his failure to take proper care of the prisoners housed at Salisbury, North Carolina, and for causing the deaths of several. He was acquitted. Howard S. Levie, "Penal Sanctions for Maltreatment of Prisoners of War," American Journal of International Law, 56 (April 1962), 436-37. Hereinafter cited as "Penal Sanctions."

long after they have been removed from the point of capture. Second, the destruction brought about by such wars deprives the population at large of both the comforts and necessities of life. Prisoners interned in their midst can anticipate sharing in these privations which may become so serious as to cause death. Third, the hatred that often follows in the wake of total war can readily be turned against the prisoners who are easy targets of abuse. And finally, as conditions deteriorate, or conversely, as the opposing forces commit more and more of their resources to the war, prisoners sometimes become one of those resources and retain the role of active combatants long after they have been deprived of their arms. This situation may occur when their lives are endangered because of some action on the part of the captor. Conversely, it may be inspired by the prisoners' desire to harass and embarrass their captors for propaganda purposes, even though such actions might lead to riots or otherwise endanger life and limb. More will be said later in this chapter regarding prisoners who, for one reason or another, continue as combatants, for the problems confronting those who find themselves in this position are almost unfathomable and worthy of careful thought.

Most of these evils affect the lives of prisoners in every form of warfare. But the intensity with which they are felt increases sufficiently during total war to warrant the conclusion that prisoners caught up in such conflicts face an entirely new environment with problems unique to it.

The ill-treatment and abuses suffered by prisoners during the Civil War, then, would appear to have been but harbingers of things to come. And in certain respects they were. But many of the threatened

dangers were ameliorated or staved off entirely by the success of a reform movement designed to alleviate the plight of all victims of war that got underway in the last half of the nineteenth century. This movement, spearheaded by civilians, rekindled public interest in the fate of prisoners of war and secured new safeguards in their behalf through the codifying of laws, publishing of army field manuals, organizing of aid societies, and promoting of international agreements.

The Civilian Reform Movement

The explanation for increased civilian interest in prisoners of war during the nineteenth century can be found in the history of civilian involvement in warfare. Prior to the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars, the general populace had little to do with the actual fighting that occurred during war. The unpleasant realities of war were known primarily to mercenary and professional soldiers. Under these circumstances, the public showed little interest in the conditions encountered by the fighting men. With few exceptions, only religious organizations, such as the Knights of St. John, the Knights of St. George, and the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, showed any serious concern for the victims of war.¹⁴

In the nineteenth century, however, aloofness on the part of the civilian population was no longer possible. Beginning with the French Revolution, the general populace was enlisted in large national armies. Furthermore, fighting was no longer restricted to the battlefield. Those who did not journey to the front encountered war on their

¹⁴William Howard Taft, ed., Service with Fighting Men: An Account of the Work of the Young Men's Christian Association in the World War, 2 vols. (New York: Association Press, 1922), II, 39-40. Hereinafter cited as Service with Fighting Men.

doorstep. The American Civil War provided the first clear and notable example of this change when total war came to the South in the last years of that struggle. No segment of the population remained unscathed. In the face of such developments, civilians showed increasing reluctance to allow the conduct of warfare to remain solely in the hands of professional soldiers. As the distinctions between the home front and the front lines disappeared, concern for the victims of war underwent a similar transformation. Civilians mistrusted the military's seeming readiness to sacrifice everything in the name of military necessity. The survival instincts of man asserted themselves. At the very time when the realities of total war seemed to demand a complete bending of the will to the dictates of war, spokesmen for humanitarian interests called for increased, rather than decreased, safeguards regarding the protection of every individual in society.¹⁵

One of the most significant achievements of the entire reform effort came during the Civil War itself. In 1863, Dr. Francis Lieber, a refugee from Germany and at the time professor of political science at Columbia College,¹⁶ drew up a set of instructions concerning prisoners of war for use by the Union armies which probably represented the first comprehensive codification of international law on

¹⁵Ibid., 39-41. The idea that civilian concern for the welfare of war victims arose in response to the advent of national armies and modern warfare is more fully outlined in Taft's text.

¹⁶William E. S. Flory, Prisoners of War: A Study in the Development of International Law (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 1942), 18, hereinafter cited as Prisoners of War; John Brown Mason, "German Prisoners of War in the United States," American Journal of International Law, 24 (April 1945), 199.

this subject issued by a government.¹⁷ Published as General Orders No. 100 and entitled "Instructions for the Government of Armies of the United States in the Field," it became the forerunner of the present day Army Field Manual 27-10, The Law of Land Warfare,¹⁸ and served as the foundation statement for later international conferences that considered the plight of prisoners of war.¹⁹ Two of its articles are of particular relevance to this study. They are:

ARTICLE 56: A prisoner of war is subject to no punishment for being a public enemy nor is any revenge wreaked upon him by the intentional infliction of any suffering, or disgrace, by cruel imprisonment, want of food, by mutilation, death, or any other barbarity.

ARTICLE 79: Whoever intentionally inflicts additional wounds on an enemy already disabled, or kills such an enemy, or who orders or encourages soldiers to do so, shall suffer death, if duly convicted, whether he belongs to the Army of the United States, or is an enemy captured after having committed his misdeed.²⁰

These articles indicate that the main emphasis in American prisoner of war policies had not changed from that of upholding the high standards of treatment set in the eighteenth century. Fortunately, the failure to uphold these standards by both the North and South did not result

¹⁷Flory, Prisoners of War, 18; Frank Freidel, Francis Lieber: Nineteenth-Century Liberal (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1947), 337, 353-56, and chap. 9, passim.

¹⁸Lamar F. Peyton, "Treatment and Utilization of Prisoners of War by the United States During World War II," (thesis, Louisiana State University, 1973), 9.

¹⁹George B. Davis, "The Prisoners of War," American Journal of International Law, 7 (July 1913), 530.

²⁰Quoted in Levie, "Penal Sanctions," 436. Levie points out that the three Civil War cases mentioned above were prosecuted as a result of violations of these rules.

in a lowering of the standards themselves. Furthermore, the introduction of a clear statement providing for sanctions against violators was an important step forward. Applying the sanctions was and still is a problem since there is a strong tendency for the victor to enforce the rules only against the vanquished.

Other efforts to improve conditions and establish safeguards for prisoners of war were underway elsewhere at this time. The terrible suffering experienced by the victims of the Crimean War, and Florence Nightingale's pioneering work in administering to the soldier's needs, sparked a wave of civilian action which, though earlier in time, nobly complemented the spirit of Lieber's work.

Building upon the momentum stirred by Nightingale's work, the Swiss government called a convention in 1864 to be held in Geneva for the express purpose of obtaining better protection through the provisions of an international agreement for personnel engaged in caring for the sick and wounded in the field. The "Geneva Convention of 1864 for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick of Armies in the Field"²¹ was adopted and won wide support. It also brought into existence the famous "Red Cross" (the Swiss flag with colors reversed) to serve as an emblem signifying relief work in the field.²² National Red Cross Societies were organized for the purpose of providing equipment and workers to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the Convention. And an International Committee

²¹This convention is often referred to as the "Red Cross Convention of 1864." It is still in force today after having gone through revisions in 1906, 1929, and 1949. Levie, "Penal Sanctions," 379, n. 15.

²²Taft, Service with Fighting Men, II, 46-47.

of the Red Cross, with headquarters in Geneva, was established as a clearing house for Red Cross activities worldwide.²³

The United States sent delegates to the Geneva Convention of 1864 but was preoccupied with the Civil War and did not immediately join in the international effort. Civilians here at home, however, did participate in relief work in an organized manner through the United States Sanitary Commission, which gathered in the scattered efforts of a large number of the "Soldiers Aid Societies" that sprang up throughout the North.²⁴

Closely related to relief work, but still somewhat different in nature, is that which falls under the category of welfare. In relation to military activities, relief is identified primarily with the easing of physical pain and suffering. Welfare, on the other hand, encompasses those activities which are more concerned with the spiritual, social, recreational, educational, and religious needs of the able bodied soldier. It is toward fulfillment of these needs that the Young Men's Christian Association has devoted itself since the mid-nineteenth century. Delegates of the Y.M.C.A. were active in the United States during the Civil War, but at the time directed their attention almost solely to religious matters. In succeeding years, however, the Y.M.C.A. came to be associated with all forms of welfare work among soldiers. These achievements characterize the response of civilians to their massive involvement in warfare.

²³Ibid., 47.

²⁴Ibid.; William Quentin Maxwell, Lincoln's Fifth Wheel: The Political History of the United States Sanitary Commission (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1956), 279, 307-08.

Partly as a result of, and certainly in conjunction with these endeavors, numerous efforts got underway to enlarge upon, clarify, and codify the body of national and international law that pertained to prisoners of war. Lieber's work and the "Geneva Convention of 1864 for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick of Armies in the Field" were products of this reform movement. More examples will be noted as we continue our survey of American prisoner of war affairs.

The Spanish American War
to World War I

Prisoners of war benefited from a major innovation in international law during the Spanish American War when the United States government requested the Protecting Powers to inspect prisoner of war camps. Though not an adequate substitute for effective sanctions, the reports of findings by neutral powers did serve to bring moral and popular pressures to bear against those guilty of abusing or neglecting the prisoners.²⁵

The designation "Protecting Power" refers to "a state which has accepted the responsibility of protecting the interests of another state in the territory of a third, with which, for some reason such as war, the second state does not maintain diplomatic

²⁵Flory, Prisoners of War, 108.

relations."²⁶ The concept of utilizing a third nation in the capacity of a Protecting Power or intermediary dates back at least to the thirteenth century, but appeared in its present form less than a century ago.²⁷ Its modern genesis was in the Franco-Prussian War wherein, probably for the first time, all of the belligerents were represented by Protecting Powers in the territory of the enemy. The functions of the Protecting Power took on their modern form because of two practices which originated during the course of that war, namely those of expelling enemy consuls and imposing stringent restrictions on enemy aliens.²⁸ A need thereby arose for someone to look after the affairs previously handled by the consuls and the aliens; the Protecting Power seemed to be an appropriate instrument for executing these duties. It was but a logical progression for the United States to request that the Protecting Power look after the prisoners of war by conducting inspections of the facilities in which they were confined and of the food and care being given them. The Protecting Power played an increasingly important role in the years ahead as its involvement in prisoner of war affairs became more clearly recognized and defined in international law.

²⁶Howard S. Levie, "Prisoners of War and the Protecting Power," American Journal of International Law, 4 (April 1961), 374. Levie goes on to point out: "Because the protection is most frequently rendered to nationals of the protected state found in the third state, the former is often referred to as the Power of Origin and the latter as the Power of Residence. For obvious reasons, in the case of prisoners of war the state by which they are held is known as the Detaining Power rather than as the Power of Residence." Ibid., 374-375.

²⁷Ibid., 375, n. 3.

²⁸Ibid., 376.

While these developments were taking place a series of international meetings were held with the object of securing agreements on the rules of war. At several of these meetings questions relating to the care of prisoners of war were considered. The first conference occurred in 1874 at Brussels. Based largely on Lieber's Code, the declaration issued at Brussels called for improvements in the treatment of prisoners. Though it was never ratified, the Brussels code had a significant influence on subsequent national legislation and the Hague conventions that followed shortly thereafter.²⁹

The First Hague Conference met in 1899 and adopted many of the provisions called for in the Brussels Declaration. It also added a few of its own, primarily relating to the establishment of information bureaus, the granting of facilities to relief societies, and officers' pay.³⁰

The need for revisions in the articles adopted in 1899 was clearly evident by 1907 when the Second Hague Conference met. At that time several changes were made. First, the distinction between internment and confinement was spelled out, the latter being considered the more rigorous, to be used sparingly and only as long as the circumstances which necessitated the measure continued to exist. Second, officers were exempted from work while under prisoner of war status. Third, since the provisions made in 1899 for the operation of information bureaus proved inadequate in the Russo-Japanese War, efforts were made

²⁹Flory, Prisoners of War, 20.

³⁰A. Pearce Higgins, The Hague Peace Conferences and other International Conferences Concerning the Laws and Usages of War. (Cambridge: University Press, 1909), 221-32, 262, 276-78.

in 1907 to improve their operation. And finally, provisions were made so that officer prisoners might receive the full pay allowed them in their own army, the amount to be paid to the detaining power by their own government.³¹

The provisions of the Second Hague Conference influenced the treatment accorded prisoners of war in the years ahead, but only indirectly. The terms of the Conference were considered binding only upon those who ratified them and only if ratified by all belligerents. Since Montenegro and Serbia had not ratified the agreement made at the 1907 Conference, during World I, all signators were released from the obligations that they had incurred. The document produced at the Hague Conference did stand, however, as a declaration of existing international law, and many nations, including the United States, adhered closely to its stipulations.³²

World War I

The legal void left by the failure of adoption of the agreement drawn up at the 1907 Hague Conference was filled by a series of bilateral agreements between the belligerents. The United States still considered its 1785 treaty with Prussia, as amended and renewed from time to time, to be in force. And as already mentioned, it adhered to the principles promulgated at the Second Hague Conference. But the United States also secured a special agreement with Germany

³¹Ibid., 261-63. In both the First and Second Hague Conferences the documentary material relating to prisoners of war appears in the Fourth Convention, Chapter II, Articles 4 through 20.

³²Flory, Prisoners of War, 22.

concerning the treatment of prisoners of war, only to have the armistice concluded before it could be ratified.³³

None of these measures successfully offset the erosion of human rights that occurred in the total war environment that emerged more strongly than ever in World War I. The capture of vast numbers of enemy soldiers, an estimated 6,000,000,³⁴ made it all but impossible for the capturing nation to provide adequate shelter and transportation for them. Equally important, the success of the economic blockade against the Central Powers and the use of unrestricted submarine warfare against England and her allies lowered the living standards of all the participants. Accordingly, many of the prisoners suffered grievously, especially in Germany.

Only about 2,600³⁵ American soldiers were captured by Germany during World War I, and they were treated rather well.³⁶ At first these prisoners were housed in scattered locations throughout Germany and shared whatever conditions prevailed in the various camps. Upon the suggestion of Conrad Hoffman, a Y.M.C.A. representative who inspected the various camps, however, the Americans were gathered into one location. Unfortunately, the Germans assigned them to Tüchel, a camp in East Prussia which consisted of damp dugouts and root cellars. As a result of persistent efforts by the American secretary of the

³³Ibid., 22-23.

³⁴Summary of World War Work of the American Y.M.C.A. (n.p.: The International Committee of Young Men's Christian Association, 1920), 100.

³⁵Taft, Service with Fighting Men, II, 302.

³⁶Grady, "Ethical and Legal Concern," 103.

Y.M.C.A., the prisoners were transferred in August, 1918, to Rastatt. This camp had been a show place, and the facilities were accordingly much more satisfactory. A great deal was done to make life more comfortable at Rastatt, as can be seen from the following account of conditions in the camp:

Through cooperation with Berne and Copenhagen, a complete athletic equipment was provided; a piano and musical instruments were furnished and a band organized; books were sent through the Swiss office, a camp newspaper was started. Regularly on Sunday mornings church services were held, with an attendance at times of 500 men. The appearance and spirit of the camp on subsequent visits differed radically from the early melancholy days—baseball games, football matches, band practice, chess, checkers, and dominoes, reading and studying all going forward simultaneously to make a kaleidoscopic pattern of activity³⁷

As already suggested, such conditions were the exception rather than the rule. Carl Dennett³⁸ calculated that the preferential treatment given to the American prisoners in Germany can be accounted for in several ways. First, the Germans held prisoners from the United States for only a brief period due to our late entry into the war, thereby lessening the discomforts associated with lengthy periods of imprisonment. Second, the United States always held more German prisoners than the total number of Americans in German hands: furthermore, the United States saw that the German prisoners were well fed and cared for. These two factors obliged the Germans to reciprocate and provide good care to American soldiers in German hands. And

³⁷Taft, Service with Fighting Men, II, 303.

³⁸Carl P. Dennett, "American Prisoners of War" (unpublished historical monograph, American National Red Cross Archives, Washington, D.C., 1918).

finally, Dennett feels that the Germans treated the prisoners well because they respected the Americans. Because the United States cared for its soldiers, Germany felt obligated to do likewise, for, Dennett observed, when the prisoners' state of origin neglected them, the Germans seemed to feel safe in indulging in brutality and harshness, but if the prisoners were cared for by their own government, the German government and the prison authorities respected them and treated them well.³⁹

The Years Between the World Wars

By the 1920s, most observers readily agreed that the existing protections for prisoners of war in international law and custom were still insufficient to ensure their well-being. The Red Cross and the Y.M.C.A. had done a creditable job of administering to their needs, and the prisoners fared better than if the reform efforts had never been undertaken, but the toll exacted by total war was still too high. Further safeguards were needed.

At the tenth annual conference of the International Red Cross (1921), work was begun on a new code. The results emerged in the form of the "Geneva Convention of 1929 Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War."⁴⁰ This work served as the basic document governing conduct toward and by prisoners of war in World War II. With its appearance, a seemingly adequate definition of humane care came into existence for the first time. Ninety-seven articles outlined the

³⁹Ibid., 95-96ff, as summarized by Grady, "Ethical and Legal Concern," 103-04.

⁴⁰Treaty Series No. 846 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1932), 35-66.

duties and responsibilities of everyone concerned from the point of capture through the completion of the repatriation process. But despite its apparent thoroughness and the careful manner in which it was written, the Geneva Convention of 1929 proved inadequate when put to the test in World War II.

World War II

All the factors which eroded the prisoner's rights and contributed to his misery in World War I were, with the exception of the definition of humane treatment just mentioned, present in World War II. And once again, they appeared on a much larger and more serious scale than ever before.

The increased difficulties arose primarily from three sources: First, the agreement reached at Geneva in 1929 did not accommodate the full spectrum of views represented around the world regarding prisoners of war. Neither Russia nor Japan agreed with or ratified the Convention. And though Japan proclaimed her intention to abide by its spirit, gross violations on her behalf were predictable in view of Japan's nonrecognition of surrender as a viable option for soldiers.⁴¹ Second, the Geneva Convention could not provide adequate protection against the machinations of totalitarian states engaged in ideological strife. The presence of a definition of humane treatment did little to ensure good treatment at the hands of the Germans who felt themselves quite justified in adopting a double standard of treatment of prisoners from the East as distinguished from those from the West. And third, the extensive use of airpower in World War II

⁴¹Grady, "Ethical and Legal Concern," 123.

brought the war into the hinterland of almost every nation in unprecedented fashion.

The Post World War II Era

The dangers and difficulties that prisoners of war encountered in World War II suggested the need for yet one more revision of the rules. Another convention met in Geneva in 1949, and in keeping with the previous trend, attempted to correct the shortcomings of previous agreements.

The main characteristic of the 1949 Convention was that it sought once again, as had the 1929 Convention, to go beyond the mere statement of principles. Whereas the Hague Convention of 1907 contained seventeen articles relative to the treatment of prisoners of war, and the 1929 Convention listed ninety-seven, the 1949 Convention included one hundred and forty-three articles. Its purpose was to impose on the contracting states very specific and detailed objectives concerning the care and safeguards to be accorded prisoners of war. In the introduction to an extensive commentary on the 1949 Convention, Jean S. Pictet asserted:

It is no exaggeration to say that prisoners of war in present or future conflicts are covered by a veritable humanitarian and administrative statute which not only protects them from the dangers of war, but also ensures that the conditions in which they are interned are as satisfactory as possible.⁴²

⁴²Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War; Commentary by Jean S. Pictet, III, The Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 (Geneva: International Committee of the Red Cross, 1960), 10.

But little comfort could be gained from his words. There were some who felt prisoners of war had been so favored long before 1949. As early as 1911 J. M. Spaight charged:

Today the prisoner of war is a spoilt darling; he is treated with a solicitude for his wants and feelings which borders on sentimentalism. [POW captivity] is usually a halcyon time, a pleasant experience to be nursed fondly in the memory, a kind of inexpensive rest-cure after the wearisome turmoil of fighting.⁴³

History proved Spaight's sarcastic optimism to be ill-founded. It has also made Pictet's words seem somewhat hollow. There is much truth to the observation that "The way to international hell seems paved with 'good' conventions."⁴⁴

These remarks are not intended to minimize the notable work of those people who strove to secure the rights and interests of prisoners through international agreements. They deserve great credit for their efforts; prisoners of war today can indeed plead for humane treatment by pointing to a vast number of safeguards established in their behalf. Rather, the comments serve merely as a means of emphasizing the lack of real progress that has been made in terms of enforcing these laws and customs.

The absence of adequate sanctions gives continuing free reign to two of the hindering factors noted earlier: disagreement over who

⁴³War Rights on Land (1911), 265, quoted in George S. Prugh, "Prisoners at War: The POW Battleground" Dickinson Law Review, 60 (October 1955-June 1956), 125, n. 10. Hereinafter cited as "Prisoners at War."

⁴⁴Attributed by Mr. Levie to one Mr. Roling who gave a series of lectures at the Hague Academy of International Law around 1960 by Levie, "Penal Sanctions," 468, n. 139.

qualifies as a prisoner of war,⁴⁵ and the decision of some to place themselves above established international law and custom. This situation is to be especially regretted in view of the declining influence of organizations such as the international branches of the Y.M.C.A. and Red Cross (because of the refusal by many countries to allow them to operate within their boundaries) and the increasing tendency not to make use of Protecting Powers. This latter development also stems in part from national jealousies, but no less important is the increasing unavailability of suitable candidates for the role. The large number of belligerents in World War II created an absence of strong neutrals from which to select Protecting Powers, and both then and now, the small number of uncommitted powers leaves little public opinion to be offended by violations of the rules of war.⁴⁶

All of these factors suggest that the prisoner of war could anticipate as many or more difficulties in the post-World War II era than ever before. The American experience in Korea and Vietnam confirmed these suspicions.

The Korean and Vietnamese Conflicts

The inhumane treatment accorded American prisoners in Korea and Vietnam is fresh in our minds and needs no further elaboration here.

⁴⁵This has become an increasingly important problem in view of the recent practice of engaging in combat under the auspices of "police actions" rather than as a result of declarations of war, for under these circumstances, it is easier for a nation bent upon ignoring the spirit and letter of the law to label as "war criminals" soldiers who actually meet all the criteria of prisoners, e.g., being members of recognized armed forces, wearing uniforms, and openly displaying arms, etc.

⁴⁶Levie, "Penal Sanctions," 381.

Several observations regarding those experiences seem appropriate at this point, however.

First, the world still is capable of expressing a sense of outrage whenever it becomes clear that prisoners of war are being abused and ill-treated, but the closed nature of certain societies makes it possible for them to engage in brutal practices over extended periods of time without much risk of detection. Maintaining such secrecy inevitably means that the prisoners are deprived of the benefits available to them through the offices of the Red Cross, the Y.M.C.A., and the Protecting Power. Second, even after evidence is produced that prisoners are being mistreated, there still exists no adequate means of securing relief for them. Third, the evils of total war persist even when conflicts are not total. Many measures adopted during the limited wars which have occurred within the past quarter century hark back to total war concepts. The two most notable examples are the revival of the "holy war" concept in pursuit of ideological ends and the casting aside of the prisoner of war status in favor of that of the prisoner at war.

The ideological content of recent wars is generally recognized and understood today. What is not so widely appreciated, however, is the effect this development has had upon prisoner of war affairs. This can best be seen by noting the recent trend to place prisoners in the position of having to remain at war as opposed to becoming prisoners of war.⁴⁷

⁴⁷Excellent discussions of the prisoner at war versus prisoner of war concepts can be found in Grady, "Ethical and Legal Concern," 169-77, and Prugh, "Prisoners at War," 123-38. Both the ideas and the facts presented below on this topic were in large part gleaned from these two works.

Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, as we have seen, it became generally accepted in international law and custom that a soldier posed a danger only so long as he was an integral part of his nation's armed forces. As an active combatant he was subject to all the dangers associated with warfare. Once taken captive and deprived of his arms, however, his status changed, and he immediately regained those protections and rights which he forfeited when he took up arms. Since the captive no longer posed a serious danger, no reason or justification remained for treating him as anything other than an unfortunate victim of war. Knowing the prisoner's limitations, the conquering nation felt safe in taking minimal safeguards against the relatively passive prisoner. This allowed the captor to treat the prisoner humanely and with consideration until he was returned home. This status did not guarantee good care for the prisoner, but it did justify the demands for humane care levied against the captor.

The same cannot be said for a captive who is assigned the status of being a prisoner at war. The distinction between being a prisoner at war and a prisoner of war is not self-evident to most people. Once explained, however, it is usually recognized as being both important and profound. Neither the prisoner of war nor the prisoner at war relinquishes his role as a fighting man because he has been deprived of his arms. But the prisoner at war is required by his own government to do more than merely try to escape or force his captor to withdraw an inordinate number of men from the front lines for guard duty; he must be as violent without arms as he would be if he still possessed them.

The Chinese prepared their soldiers for such a role in the

Korean War. The results of their having done so can only be viewed, according to western standards, as a mark of regression in the dismal history of prisoner of war affairs. Chinese prisoners formed well-disciplined military organizations within their camps and frequently used them to inflict corporal punishment and death upon fellow prisoners and execute staged riots for propaganda purposes. The response such activity forces from the detaining power can only be viewed as a tragedy by those who have sought to alleviate the plight of prisoners of war. The prisoner is no longer a relatively passive human being in need of care and protection until the end of the war; he is, in effect, still an active combatant of the most vicious sort, and must be treated as such. The small ratio of guards to prisoners dictates that whenever prisoners act in a threatening manner, either individually or en masse, unarmed though they may be, arms will be used against them. And in numerous instances this represents only the most visible response; the detaining power frequently is forced to utilize other countermeasures. Once initiated, this process can only lead to partial or complete abandonment of the gains achieved by the Geneva Conventions. The door is thereby opened for reprisals, and prisoners are bound to suffer as a result of the regressive spiral that has been set in motion.

Some see the United States Military Code of Conduct as an example of our having joined in the regressive trend initiated by the Chinese in the Korean War.⁴⁸ Disturbed by the knowledge that American

⁴⁸Grady, "Ethical and Legal Concern," 172-77.

soldiers betrayed their country and fellow servicemen in that war, the United States adopted a code which requires a captive to conduct himself at all times not just as a soldier, but in stronger terms, as a fighting man. This requirement does not, however, place American captives in the status of being prisoners at war, for the training given American soldiers stresses that the duty to remain a fighting man does not justify resorting to violence, except, of course, in self-defense.⁴⁹

The issue is raised here as an indication of the trend which is visible today. It is clear, then, that the ideological nature of the conflicts that have dominated recent warfare has led to a significant change in the status of certain prisoners of war. The tendency to fight fire with fire is strong in this instance: innocent prisoners are caught in a form of struggle in which they are sometimes expected to use their lives and limbs as weapons. To encourage such barbaric sacrifices in the name of warfare is to ignore the hard-won heritage of civilization itself.

⁴⁹See the U.S. Fighting Man's Code (Washington: Department of Defense, Armed Forces Information and Education, 1955), Article 3, p. 59ff. which states in part: "The PW should never give his captor any valid reason to label him a war criminal and treat him as one. Except in extremely desperate circumstances, the PW should avoid violence" In all fairness, it must be admitted that Grady's argument covers issues other than violence. Among them are questions of the right to accept parole and the right to refuse to attempt to escape. I have chosen not to address these two items at this point primarily because I feel they are not inherently contained in the prisoner of war concept in the same sense that violence is (see Prugh, "Prisoners at War," 137). In addition, both parole and escape will be discussed at length in later chapters.

CHAPTER III

THE GERMAN PRISONER OF WAR SYSTEM

Introduction

The male Behemoth and the female Leviathan are two mythological monsters whose names are associated with chaotic rule. The chaos they invoke originates partly from their satanic identities and partly from their continual and deathly combat against one another motivated by the desire of each to reign supreme. When Hobbes adapted these two monsters to England's political circumstances in the mid-seventeenth century, however, he depicted Leviathan's rule as the lesser of the two evils. For him, Behemoth continued to represent a non-state in which lawlessness, disorder, anarchy, and complete chaos prevailed. Leviathan rule, on the other hand, signified for him a "political system of coercion in which vestiges of the rule of law and of individual rights are still preserved."¹

Hobbes' depiction of these two monsters can be aptly transposed to more modern times. In 1941 Franz Neumann recognized Behemoth in National Socialism. Since he believed German was, or at least was becoming "a non-state, a chaos, a rule of lawlessness and anarchy," he attached the name Behemoth to the chaotic and corrupt Nazi regime.²

¹Franz Neumann, Behemoth: the Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933-1944 (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1966), xii.

²Ibid.

The suitability of the appellation became so apparent that many felt Leviathan's mollifying influence was no longer present anywhere in Germany. The author of this study believes not only that vestiges of the rule of law and respect for individual rights were present in Nazi Germany, but also that they were manifested in a most unlikely place, a German prisoner of war camp.

It must be added that this proposition takes full cognizance of the deprived nature of Leviathan rule itself. The ancients were quite correct in labeling Leviathan a monster. And Hobbes' attempt to make a coercive political system more palatable by attributing to it some semblance of law and respect for rights has little appeal to those familiar with the liberties enjoyed by citizens of free, democratic societies. But the meager benefits of Leviathan rule assume unusual importance in the midst of a situation as chaotic as that which prevailed in the Third Reich.

The anomaly of the presence of these benefits in a prison camp is especially intriguing. Our curiosity causes us to ask how such benefits might be enjoyed there, of all places, when they were paid so little heed elsewhere in Germany. It also leads us to inquire into the nature of rule by law and respect for individual rights under these circumstances. And finally, our sense of justice demands an accounting of how well Leviathan's influence lessened the evils of Nazi rule.

The purpose of this chapter is to answer these and related questions. It does so by first noting some conclusions that have been drawn in the past about the German prisoner of war system and then examining these conclusions in detail. Particular attention is

given to the various images of the system that emerged both during and after the war from the Nuremberg trials and elsewhere, the policies Germany adopted toward prisoners of war which gave substance to those images, the command structure she utilized to put those policies into practice, and the magnitude of the operations assigned to the personnel in the command structure.

Conflicting Impressions Concerning
the German Prisoner of War System

There undoubtedly exist as many different impressions of the German prisoner of war system as there have been individuals who have formed opinions on the subject. We will concern ourselves here, however, with only a few of the more prominent and lasting ones. These consist primarily of the following: First, there is the general belief that the German prisoner of war system functioned efficiently and in accordance with the letter, if not the spirit, of the law, and that prisoners under its control were treated correctly, though not always humanely.³ A second impression, and one that has already been mentioned in connection with the television production "Hogan's Heroes," is that the German prisoner of war system was a replica of its gullible and "stupid" parent society. The final, and perhaps most lasting of the impressions discussed here, is that which emerged from the Nuremberg trials, that of a grim, dismal, and brutal system that may be identified with the infamous concentration camps.

There is some basis in fact for all of these impressions. Of the three, the one least worthy of serious consideration is that of

³A typical statement to this effect is found in Guy Morgan's P.O.W. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1946), xii.

the Hogan's Heroes" stereotype. The other two impressions are considerably more valid, although each in its own way.

We can explain the existence of these two remaining conflicting impressions by noting that the German prisoner of war system exhibited many faces: one for the East, another for the West; one for officers, another for the lower ranks; one for international scrutiny, another for Hitler's approval; one for portrayal to the prisoner's next-of-kin through the pages of Red Cross bulletins, another for the dockets at Nuremberg. Inasmuch as the Nuremberg trials have so greatly influenced our attitudes towards Germany in general, perhaps it would be appropriate for us to examine first the face of the prisoner of war system unmasked during those proceedings.

The prison system officials on trial at Nuremberg did their best to bring out the best in their organization, but the evidence against them seemed overwhelming. The prosecution began its case against those accused of committing crimes against prisoners of war by asserting that:

The defendants murdered and ill-treated prisoners of war by denying them adequate food, shelter, clothing and medical care and attention; by forcing them to labor in inhumane conditions; by torturing them and subjecting them to inhuman indignities and by killing them. The German Government and the German High Command imprisoned prisoners of war in various concentration camps, where they were killed and subjected to inhuman treatment by . . . various methods . . . Members of the armed forces of the countries with whom Germany was at war were frequently murdered while in the act of surrendering. These murders and ill-treatment were contrary to International Conventions . . . the laws and customs of war, the general principles of criminal law as derived from the criminal

laws of all civilized nations, [and to] the internal penal laws of the countries in which such crimes were committed⁴

This statement was followed by a list of particulars which served as examples of the kinds of treatment the prosecution later outlined in detail. In brief, they consisted of the following:

1. In the Western Countries:

French officers who escaped from Oflag X C were handed over to the Gestapo and disappeared; others were murdered by their guards; others sent to concentration camps and exterminated.

Frequently prisoners captured on the Western Front were obliged to march to the camps until they completely collapsed. Some of them walked more than 600 kilometers with hardly any food; they marched on for 48 hours running, without being fed; among them a certain number died of exhaustion or of hunger; stragglers were systematically murdered.

Bodily punishments were inflicted upon non-commissioned officers and cadets who refused to work. On 24 December, three French non-commissioned officers were murdered for that motive in Stalag IV A. Many ill-treatments were inflicted without motive with rifle butts, and whipping; in Stalag XX B the sick themselves were beaten many times by sentries; in Stalag IIIB and Stalag IIIC, worn-out prisoners were murdered or grievously wounded. In military jails in Graudenz for instance, in reprisal camps as in Rava-Ruska, the food was so insufficient that the men lost more than 15 kilograms [each] in a few weeks. In May 1942, one loaf of bread only was distributed [daily] in Rava-Ruska to each group of 35 men.

Orders were given to transfer French officers in chains to the camp of Mauthausen after they had tried to escape. At their arrival in camp they were murdered, either by shooting or by gas

⁴International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg. Trial of the Major Criminals before the International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg, 14 November 1945 - 1 October 1946 (Nuremberg, Germany: Secretariat of the International Military Tribunal, 1948), I, 52-53. Hereinafter cited as IMT.

American prisoners . . . were murdered in Normandy during the summer of 1944 and in the Ardennes in December 1944. American prisoners were starved, beaten, and otherwise mistreated in numerous Stalags in Germany and in the occupied countries, particularly in 1943, 1944, and 1945.

2. In the Eastern Countries:

At Orel prisoners of war were exterminated by starvation, shooting, exposure, and poisoning.

Soviet prisoners of war were murdered en masse on orders from the High Command and the Headquarters of the SIPO and SD. Tens of thousands of Soviet prisoners of war were tortured and murdered at the "Gross Lazaret" at Slavuta.

Prisoners of war who escaped and were recaptured were handed over to SIPO and SD for shooting.

In March 1944, 50 R.A.F. officers who escaped from Stalag Luft III at Sagan, when recaptured were murdered.

In September 1941, 11,000 Polish officers who were prisoners of war were killed in the Katyn Forest near Smolensk.⁵

On the whole, these charges were later fully substantiated. By the time the verdicts were read in the autumn of 1946, the facts revealed a shameful record which cast a dark shadow over the entire German prisoner of war system.⁶

The Tribunal's findings would clearly seem to refute any assertions that Leviathan survived in the German prisoner of war system. It must be remembered, however, that the proceedings at Nuremberg were designed to reveal primarily the worst elements of the German prisoner of war system. A more balanced view reveals that alongside this

⁵Ibid., 53-54.

⁶The portion of the "Judgement" which pertains to prisoners of war may be found in IMT, XXII, 471-475. Many of the items mentioned in these pages will be discussed below.

disgusting face a more reputable form can be seen, one which has enabled many observers to look more kindly upon certain sectors of the system. The nature of this form and the sectors in which it operated can be ascertained from the general policies which governed prisoner of war affairs in Germany during World War II.

General Policies Relating to
Prisoners of War in Germany

In the broadest sense, the Germans developed two policies relating to prisoners of war—one of almost total disregard for the interests of humanity and law in dealing with prisoners from the East, and another calling for correct, if not always humane, treatment of prisoners from the West. Not unexpectedly, the policies themselves were based almost exclusively on criteria of race and ideology.

The effect of Nazi Germany's racial beliefs upon policies relating to prisoners of war from the East can be surmised from Germany's conduct throughout the war on the Russian front. As Gordon Wright has pointed out, Nazi racial policy was clearly the decisive factor in explaining this gruesome chapter in the history of the war.⁷ He reveals the essence of the problem when he says:

With the attack on Russia, the Germans embarked on a savage propaganda campaign designed to justify their conduct in the east. The word Untermenschen, heretofore rarely used by the Nazis, now entered the common language; soldiers and civilians alike were deluged with pamphlets and periodicals that purported

⁷Gordon Wright, The Ordeal of Total War, 1939-1945 (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1968), 126. Strictly speaking, the Germans should not have referred to the Russians as a "race," but since the Nazis and others who have written on German policies adopted this usage, the word "race" is used in reference to the Russians here also.

to demonstrate the subhuman character of the eastern peoples. Carefully-selected photographs of Russian prisoners reinforced this message. That the Nazi leaders believed their own propaganda is clear. The Russians, noted Goebbels in his diary, 'are not people, but a conglomeration of animals.' And Hitler added, in an order of the day to the armed forces, 'This enemy consists not of soldiers but to a large extent only of beasts.'⁸

With such racial attitudes serving as a foundation, it was quite natural for Germany to develop brutal policies regarding the treatment of Russian prisoners of war.

Ideological considerations were also important. Erwin Lahousen, assistant to Intelligence Chief Admiral Canaris, testified to this effect at Nuremberg. He stated that the Red army man was looked upon by the German High Command as an ideological enemy and therefore subjected to "special measures." These consisted in part of dividing the Soviet prisoners into two groups, those that were to be shot and those that were to be interned. Theoretically speaking, only those who were Bolshevistically tainted were to be shot. In reality, little effort was made to determine the prisoners' political leanings. The process was quite arbitrary, and protests against these measures by men like Lahousen secured only the minor concession of having the victims moved some distance away before the executions were carried out.⁹

Many of those interned in camps fared little better. Lahousen also testified that:

. . . enormous crowds of prisoners of war remained in the theater of operation, without

⁸Ibid., 126. The Langenscheidt Concise German Dictionary defines Untermenchen as "brute, gangster."

⁹Testimony of Erwin Lahousen, November 30, 1945, IMT, II, 471.

proper care—care in the sense of prisoner of war conventions—with regard to housing, food, medical care; and many of them died on the bare floor. Epidemics broke out, and cannibalism . . . manifested itself.¹⁰

Alfred Rosenberg, Reich Minister for Occupied Eastern Territories, revealed more than he perhaps intended when he wrote to Wilhelm Keitel on February 28, 1942:

The fate of the Soviet prisoners of war in Germany is on the contrary a tragedy of the greatest extent. Of 3,600,000 prisoners of war, only several hundred thousand are still able to work fully. A large part of them has starved, or died, because of the hazards of the weather. Thousands also died from spotted fever The camp commanders have forbidden the civilian population to put food at the disposal of the prisoners, and they have rather let them starve to death . . .¹¹

In time the treatment given to Russian prisoners changed somewhat for the better. General Westhoff, a high official in the German prisoner of war system, testified thusly:

. . . until 1942, the Russian prisoners of war were treated on the basis of purely political considerations. After 1942 this was changed, and in 1943, as long as I was in the German High Command, prisoners of war were treated in accordance with the Geneva Convention, that is to say, in all points their treatment was adapted to that of the other prisoners of war. Their rations were the same as those of the others, and their employment and their treatment was in every detail in accordance with the treatment given prisoners of war of other powers, with certain exceptions.¹²

¹⁰Testimony of Erwin Lahousen, November 30, 1945, IMT, II, 460.

¹¹As quoted by Mr. Justice Jackson, Chief Prosecutor for the United States at Nuremberg, IMT, II, 137.

¹²Testimony of General Adolf Westhoff, April 10, 1946, IMT, XI, 184.

A great deal of emphasis must be placed upon the phrase "with certain exceptions" since further testimony at Nuremberg revealed that huge numbers of Russian prisoners continued to suffer prejudicial treatment. Furthermore, the reason for improving the treatment afforded Soviet prisoners was to salvage a wasted workforce, not because of any change of heart toward the Russians. The "tragedy" that Alfred Rosenberg detected did not, in his mind, consist of the loss of human life, but rather in the regrettable loss of laborers.¹³

A report issued by a labor allocation office, dated 19 February, 1942, again reveals the extent of this loss:

There were 3,900,000 Russians at our disposal, of which at present there are only 1,100,000 left. From November 1941 to January 1942 alone 500,000 Russians died.¹⁴

In this instance the Germans came to realize that transportation problems accounted for many of the deaths. The same labor report emphasized this point:

The utilization of these Russians is exclusively a question of transportation. It is senseless to transport this manpower in open or unheated closed boxcars and then to unload corpses at the place of destination.¹⁵

The military and economic realities of the situation forced the Germans to alter their treatment of the prisoners of war. Field Marshal Keitel recalled the situation:

The army alone needed replacements numbering from 2 to 2.5 million men every year. Assuming

¹³See extract of letter written by Alfred Rosenberg quoted by Justice Jackson, IMT, II, 137.

¹⁴As quoted by Colonel Pokrovsky, Russian prosecutor at Nuremberg, IMT, XI, 187.

¹⁵As quoted by Colonel Pokrovsky, IMT, XI, 186.

that about 1 million of these would come from normal recruiting and about half a million from rehabilitated men . . . that still left 1.5 million to be replaced every year. These could be withdrawn from the war economy and placed at the disposal of the services, the Armed Forces. From this fact resulted the close correlation between the drawing off of these men from the war economy and their replacement by new workers. This manpower had to be taken from the prisoners of war on the one hand and Plenipotentiary Sauckel, whose functions may be summarized as the task of procuring labor, on the other hand.¹⁶

But a policy evolved from necessity very seldom bears fruit beyond the barest essentials. The original thrust Hitler gave to the direction of the war against Russia never lost its flavor. And as Keitel himself readily admitted, Hitler and his followers could never speak of Bolshevism as anything less than a deadly enemy, the war against which could not be viewed as a battle between two states to be waged in accordance with the rules of international law, but only as a conflict between two ideologies.¹⁷

All of this clearly demonstrates the relationship that existed between Nazi racial attitudes and ideological concerns, on the one hand, and the development of brutal policies pertaining to prisoners of war from the East, and the merciless implementation of these policies, on the other. In almost reverse fashion, the same relationships existed in regard to the treatment of prisoners of war from the West.

Nazi Germany held the Commonwealth countries and the United States in somewhat higher esteem than she did the countries of the East.

¹⁶Testimony of Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, April 5, 1946, IMT, X, 561.

¹⁷Ibid., 558.

This fact is so well recognized that no further proof of it need be offered here. What is important, however, is that we fully understand how this more favorable attitude revealed itself through German policies regarding prisoners from the Western countries. Generally speaking, it manifested itself in policies calling for fairly strict observance of all legal requirements toward the prisoners as outlined by the Geneva Convention.

Germany had much to gain by adopting such policies toward Western prisoners of war. She was well aware of the large number of German soldiers held in captivity by the West. In the spring of 1945, Lieutenant General Gottlob Berger, the SS General who was in charge of all prisoner of war affairs in Germany at that time, reminded Hitler that Germany held only about 320,000 prisoners from the West while the West had approximately 1.2 million Germans in custody.¹⁸

Moreover, Germany had every reason to believe that the Western Allies would adhere to the terms of the Geneva Convention of 1929 unless provoked into doing otherwise. All of them had signed the Convention, and inspection reports from various sources supplied ample evidence that former German soldiers were being treated well.¹⁹ Germany

¹⁸Letter from General Gottlob Berger to General Delmar T. Spivey, 6 August 1964, Berger Folder, Spivey Collection [Special Collections Room, USAF Academy Library, Colorado].

¹⁹In the last chapter mention was made of the inspection of prisoner of war camps by the Protecting Power. This practice was formalized in the 1929 Convention. In addition, the right of inspection was granted to other organizations at this time, and by World War II it was standard practice for the Red Cross and certain charitable organizations such as the Y.M.C.A. to conduct fairly regular inspections. See the Geneva Convention of 1929, especially Title III, Section IV, "Prisoners Relations with the Authorities," and Title VI, "Bureaus of Relief and Information Concerning Prisoners of War." Treaty Series, No. 846 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1932).

knew she must reciprocate at least in some measure if she did not want to subject her soldiers in Allied hands to reprisals. Observing the terms of the Convention was the surest way of convincing the Western Allies that she was reciprocating.

Germany thus adopted two distinct policies toward prisoners of war in World War II—one of merciless brutality for prisoners from the East, and one of observance to the letter of the law in regard to treatment accorded prisoners from the West. With varying degrees of success, these policies were implemented, usually with shocking disregard for the inconsistencies they contained. One can explain in part how this phenomenon occurred by pointing to the complex command structure that was utilized to put these policies into practice.

The Command Structure

The design of the command structure determines who exercises authority, and those who hold positions of authority are usually the ones who determine how established policies are implemented. These truisms evidence themselves particularly well in military organizations, and the German prisoner of war system was no exception. The purpose of this section is to analyze the command structure of the German prisoner of war system in order to 1) determine its component parts and basic framework, 2) note the duties and responsibilities assigned to each of these components, and 3) assess the ways in which these command arrangements affected the implementation of the German prisoner of war policies outlined in the last section. In keeping with the thesis of this study, primary emphasis is reserved for affairs in the West, and in particular for those elements in the command structure which affected the lives of the prisoners in Stalag Luft III.

On paper, the German prisoner of war system was under the control of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (O.K.W.)²⁰ throughout the war.²¹ This meant that Hitler, as Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht, had the final word in all prisoner of war matters. Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, Chief of O.K.W., served as his immediate subordinate in the chain of command. General Hermann Reinecke served below Keitel and administered the General Armed Forces Office (Allgemeines Wehrmachtssamt, ordinarily abbreviated AWA, the office within O.K.W. which, among other things, exercised control over prisoner of war affairs.²²

²⁰The O.K.W. was the High Command of the German Armed Forces. Hitler was Supreme Commander and General (later Field Marshal) Wilhelm Keitel was Chief of O.K.W. The designation Wehrmacht itself refers to the combined armed forces comprised of the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

²¹Primarily five sources were relied upon for the information presented in this section: the various records of the Nuremberg trials, British intelligence reports, a book entitled Crimes Against POWs: Responsibility of the Wehrmacht by Szymon Datner (Warsaw: Zachodnia Agencja Prasowa, 1964), hereinafter cited as Crimes Against POWs, and the personal observations of two German officials. The British reports are part of a large series compiled by the C.S.D.I.C. (Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Center). The ones used here are C.S.D.I.C. (U.K.) S.R.G.G. 1303 and 315. The S.R.G.G. 1303 report has no title, but may be located by its number among the records of the British War Ministry that are housed at the Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center at Maxwell AFB, Alabama, hereinafter cited as S.R.G.G. 1303. The S.R.G.G. 315 report is titled "The Kriegsgefangenenwesen," and a copy may be found in File 100-411-23, Record Group 153, Records of the Office of the Judge Advocate General, Washington National Record Center, Suitland, Maryland, hereinafter cited as "The Kriegsgefangenenwesen." The two German officials, both of whom held posts in the prisoner of war system, wrote about their jobs and experiences in personal letters to Major General Delmar T. Spivey, USAF, Retired. General Gottlob Berger took charge of all prisoners of war in Germany on October 1, 1944. Dr. Major Gustov Simoleit served both as Deputy Commander and Commander of Stalag Luft I and as Deputy Commander of Stalag Luft III. Their correspondence is located in the Spivey Collection under their respective names.

²²Testimony of General Gottlob Berger, Trials of War Criminals before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1952), XIII, 58-61. Hereinafter cited as Trials.

And finally, within the General Armed Forces Office there existed one office the sole responsibility of which was prisoners of war. It was generally referred to as Abt Kriegsgefangenenwesen im O.K.W., which can be translated as the Abteilung (office) wesen (entity) in charge of (prisoners) gefangenen (of war) Kriegs, or Prisoners of War Office. In early 1943 this office was expanded into an Amtsgruppe (group of offices), two offices comprising the group. Their titles, respective sections, and assigned duties are as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

ALLGEMEINE ABT
(General Office)

Gruppe I: Discipline, punishment, and legal proceedings.

Gruppe II: Liaison with the Protecting Powers and Foreign Office.

Gruppe III: Exclusively concerned with German prisoners in Allied hands.

Gruppe IV: Administration (stores, equipment, clothes, and food).

Gruppe V: Welfare and liaison with Red Cross and YMCA organizations.

Gruppe VI: Return or exchange of prisoners.

ABT ORGANIZATION
(Organization Office)

Gruppe I: Responsible for all plans of new camps or changing of sites of camps and the planning of large transports of prisoners.

Gruppe II: Personnel. Responsible for postings of the German officers holding such positions as

a) Kommandeur of Kriegsgefangenenwesen (KGW) in each Wehrkreis (Military District) or Luftgau (Air District)

b) Lager Kommandanten (camp commanders)

c) Deputy Lager Kommandanten

Gruppe III: Camp security and investigation of escapes.

Source: "The Kriegsgefangenenwesen," 2-3.

The first office, designated Allgemeine Abt (General Office) was primarily responsible for the "handling" of prisoners of war and contacts with foreign governments and relief and welfare organizations. The

second office, Abt Organization (Organization Office), was assigned the duties associated with camp construction, administration, and the appointment of personnel.²³

The outline of the command structure to this point clearly shows that on paper, at least, the Prisoner of War Office in the General Armed Forces Office of O.K.W. was responsible for the entire prisoner of war system. But the structure was more complex than that, for while the Prisoner of War Office could not delegate responsibility, that office and others above it in the chain of command could and did delegate authority. And the delegated authority went to the Army, Navy, and Air Force chiefs who assumed control of virtually all matters pertaining to camp administration (i.e., those duties assigned primarily to Abt Organization) in the camps which housed prisoners from their enemy sister services.²⁴

It is not possible to determine precisely how or why the three services were able to gain administrative authority in the camps. However, the airmen believed that Goering was the man who secured this arrangement for the downed fliers.²⁵

Goering did wield tremendous influence with Hitler, and it is logical to assume that he utilized his favored position to secure good treatment for his beloved fellow fliers. Goering apparently never lost the sense of chivalry he had acquired in World War I, and he felt

²³"The Kriegsgefangenenwesen," 2-3.

²⁴Trials, XI, 649.

²⁵Gustov Simoleit to Delmar T. Spivey, March 17, 1948, Simoleit Folder, Spivey Collection.

there was a special bond between fliers of all nations.²⁶

However, it is also possible that the entire arrangement resulted from practical concerns. During the early months of the war, the only German prisoners in British hands were airmen. Segregating captured airmen in Germany made it easier for the Germans to provide them with special care, all of which was carefully made known to the British so that captured German airmen would receive good treatment in England.²⁷ Whatever the reason for assigning control of the camps to the individual services, the decision made it possible for the Luftwaffe to affect virtually every aspect of life in the camps under its control, almost to the total exclusion of army or O.K.W. influence. Major Gustov Simoleit, Deputy Commander of Stalag Luft III, provides some insight into how the arrangement worked in practice:

. . . in each military district (Wehrkreis) was a Commander of the Prisoners (Kommandeur der Kriegsgefangenen), an army general. Under his command were all the camps in the district. But except [for] the regular reports we had not very much contact with him. Goering had great influence and so the air force camps were a special section. In all personnel matters of German officers and men and all economic administration (construction of camps, food, accommodation, clothing, etc., of the prisoners) we were under the command of the air district (Luftgau).²⁸

There were two other command channels which affected life in

²⁶U.S. Office of United States Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Nazi Criminality, Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression (Washington, D.C., United States Government Printing Office, 1952), Supp. B, 77.

²⁷Gustov Simoleit, "Prisoners of War Camps of the German Air Force in World War II," enclosed in Simoleit to Delmar T. Spivey, May 5, 1969, Simoleit Folder, Spivey Collection.

²⁸Gustov Simoleit to Delmar T. Spivey, March 17, 1948, Simoleit Folder, Spivey Collection.

the camps—an inspectorate and an intelligence network. The office of Inspekteur des Kriegsgefangenenwesen (Inspector of Prisoners of War) was a part of O.K.W., but its place in the chain of command and the duties and powers assigned to it changed from time to time. Its mission was to inspect the camps administered by all three services to ascertain whether the basic directives issued by the Prisoner of War Office in O.K.W. were being carried out.²⁹ Until its temporary demise in April 1944 it had no power to issue orders. In June 1943, however, a supplementary inspection system was established, titled the General Inspekteur des Kriegsgefangenenwesen, which was given authority to issue orders direct to camp commanders and others in the system and to take disciplinary measures on the spot against camp personnel (but not prisoners).³⁰ The General Inspector reported directly to Keitel.³¹ In effect, this meant that an inspector could bypass two echelons of control (the Chief of the Prisoner of War Office, who in turn would have reported to the Chief of the General Armed Forces Office in O.K.W. before sending the matter on to Keitel, Chief of O.K.W.). In October 1944 the Office of General Inspector was disbanded while the office of Inspekteur des Kriegsgefangenenwesen, which had been inactive and unoccupied from April 1944 until October 1944 again became the office primarily responsible for inspecting the camps. It is unclear whether or not this change meant the loss of direct access to Keitel. Whatever the case, it is evident that from the beginning, and especially

²⁹Testimony of Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, April 4, 1946, IMT, X, 554.

³⁰"The Kriegsgefangenenwesen," 3; Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, Supp. B, 265-66.

³¹Trials, XI, 650.

from June 1943 on, the inspector and his staff comprised an important element in the command structure and that their presence in any camp warranted special care and attention from both the camp staff and the prisoners.

The intelligence network set up by the Germans for use in the camps was associated with the Abwehr (The Intelligence and Clandestine Warfare Service of the German High Command). Each camp had one or more Abwehr officers assigned to it. They were part of the camp commander's staff but also reported directly to their superiors in the Abwehr chain of command.³² The holders of this office were primarily concerned with security, searches, and escapes. It is impossible to ascertain with any certainty their relationship to the SS and Gestapo in regard to these matters. The evidence suggests, however, that the Abwehr officers were responsible for these affairs inside the camps while the SS and Gestapo operated outside the camps.³³ This arrangement was the source of much conflict within the German prisoner of war system.

Although the Abwehr was responsible for frustrating escape attempts, the small number of Abwehr officers assigned to any one camp (three in the case of Stalag Luft III)³⁴ meant that they had to rely in part upon other camp personnel in the execution of their duties. Accordingly, whenever successful escapes took place, the entire prisoner of war system came under indictment. This resulted in

³²Gustov Simoleit to Delmar T. Spivey, March 17, 1948, Simoleit Folder, Spivey Collection.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

increased pressure to devise a better security system.

Men like Himmler virgorously argued that only the SS and Gestapo could do the job properly. Camp administrators and prisoners alike expressed anxiety that Himmler might have his way. The administrators mentioned to the prisoners the possibilities of this happening as a means of discouraging escape activities. And the prisoners had to weigh carefully their duty to escape against the threat that their actions might hasten the day when the SS could gain control over their lives. In October 1944 their worst fears seemed to materialize. On the first day of that month, the SS was reportedly placed in charge of the camps.

A great stir arose around the world when word got out that Himmler had been placed in charge of prisoner of war affairs.³⁵ He had been endeavoring to secure control of the prisoner of war system for some time. His primary interest was to tighten security in the Reich,³⁶ and the issue which thus opened the door for him was the problem of escapes. During 1943, between 46,000 and 48,000 prisoners reportedly escaped, mainly in the East.³⁷ Although the number of successful escapes had been greatly reduced by late 1944, the dangers posed by escapers continued. Hitler was concerned that they might

³⁵Testimony of General Gottlob Berger, Trials, XIII, 62.

³⁶Testimony of Wilhelm Keitel, April 5, 1946, IMT, X, 559-60.

³⁷S.R.G.G. 1303, 2. In testimony given on April 5, 1946, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel stated that he was told (apparently by Hitler) that during the summer of 1942 the Quartermaster General said that "thousands of Russian prisoners of war were escaping every month, that they disappeared among the population, immediately discarded their uniforms, and procured civilian clothes and could no longer be identified," IMT, X, 564.

engage in sabotage or, worse yet, organize a revolt among the six million foreigners in Germany.³⁸ Himmler openly accused Keitel of being too lax and convinced Hitler that the SS could provide adequate security against escapes and the ensuing danger of sabotage and internal disorder. The escape of seventy-six airmen from Stalag Luft III served Himmler's purposes well; Hitler put the incident at the top of his list of reasons for making the command changes.³⁹ He claimed that "all the people were lying to him and betraying him and that the Sagan affair would not have happened if the commander there had acted and undertaken suitable measures, in accordance with his duties."⁴⁰

Most observers at the time concluded that Himmler secured control over the entire prisoner of war system in the fall of 1944.

Major Simoleit recalled the transfer of power in these terms:

In the first years of the war neither the SS nor the Gestapo nor any other police had anything to do with our camps, and we did what we could to keep them apart. In 1944 Himmler was appointed Chief of all PW matters, so we were put under the command of the 'Higher SS and Police Leader of the district! That was a very unpleasant time and we always lived in fear and expectation of some dangerous regulations and measures⁴¹

³⁸Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, Supp. B, 71.

³⁹Hitler gave four reasons altogether. They were 1) the escape from Stalag Luft III, 2) the discovery of a broadcasting station in the American prisoner of war camp at Fuerstenberg, 3) the revolt in Warsaw, and 4) the Allied plan concerning the landing of airborne troops and parachutists in the vicinity of prisoner of war camps. Testimony of Gottlob Berger at Nuremberg, Trials, XIII, 60.

⁴⁰As paraphrased by General Gottlob Berger, Ibid.

⁴¹Gustov Simoleit to Delmar T. Spivey, March 17, 1948, Simoleit Folder, Spivey Collection.

In reality, Himmler's control was somewhat less than complete, though it was by no means insignificant.

The responsibility for the whole organization remained with Keitel as Chief of the O.K.W.,⁴² but the offices at his disposal were greatly reduced. He was, in fact, allowed to retain effective control over only the General Office (see Figure 1). That portion of the system which had been delegated to the individual services, corresponding roughly with the duties exercised by the Organization Office, now came under the control of the SS.⁴³ Seemingly, then, the worst fears of the prison officials were realized—the SS was now in control of the prisoner of war camps.

Special quirks in the bureaucratic framework, however, made the reorganization a relatively hollow gesture as far as the administration of camps housing primarily British and American prisoners was concerned. Himmler was a busy man by this time and had to rely almost exclusively upon subordinates to do his bidding in matters pertaining to the prisoners of war. As already noted, his concern was twofold: to utilize the prisoners in the labor force and to diminish the dangers to the Reich presented by the escapers. To achieve these ends, he selected three men to assist him: Gottlob Berger, Dr. Ernst Kaltenbrunner, and Oswald Pohl, all high ranking SS men. As Chief of Administration and Economic affairs in the Main Office SS and Ministerial Director of the Reich Ministry of the Interior, Oswald Pohl was admirably situated to fulfill Himmler's requests for allocations

⁴²"The Kriegsgefangenenwesen," 4.

⁴³Ibid.

of laborers from among the ranks of the prisoners of war. Dr. Ernst Kaltenbrunner was Chief of Security Police and Security Service, Chief of the Reich Security Main Office, and General of Police, which made him the logical man to assume responsibility for tightening security measures. And finally, the man placed in charge of the entire SS mechanism as it pertained to the prisoner of war system was SS-Obergruppenfuehrer and General der Waffen-SS, Gottlob Berger.

General Berger's role in prisoner of war affairs is hard to delineate. From May until September 30, 1944, both Hitler and Himmler had led Berger to believe that he was to assume authority over all such affairs without limitations or restrictions.⁴⁴ As indicated above, however, his control was far from complete. The Prisoner of War Office in O.K.W. retained control over affairs conducted by the General Office, and Pohl and Kaltenbrunner exercised great influence in labor and security matters. Furthermore, Berger did not have control over prisoner of war camps in the operational areas. As the various fronts receded, the commander of the army group in each area became responsible for the prisoner of war camps in his sector.⁴⁵

⁴⁴Testimony of General Gottlob Berger, Trials, XIII, 59.

⁴⁵Ibid., 61. This, incidently, had always been the case. The authority of the O.K.W., for example, did not even extend to the Russian front; and the Army and Security Services controlled prisoner affairs there. In the West O.K.W. exercised control, but it was always understood that the prisoner of war system proper did not assume control over the prisoners until they had been evacuated from the operational areas. There was, of course, a system for processing the prisoners within the operational zones, but the methods of doing so varied greatly because of differing circumstances: Datner, Crimes Against POWs, 2-5; Final Defense Plea of Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, Supp. B, 273.

Berger exercised almost complete control, however, in regard to the administration of the camps outside the combat zones, and he used his power to prevent the very thing which many people thought had already happened and which the prisoners feared most—the complete takeover of the camps by SS personnel.

Berger told Hitler that he did not wish to take over the prisoner of war system since he had no ambitions to become a custodian of prisoners and felt that he was not a policeman by nature. Hitler sharply rebuked Berger and told him that his generals did what he wished them to do.

Berger dutifully acquiesced, but decided to take some precautions that had surprising results.⁴⁶ He learned from an acquaintance assigned to the Swiss Legation in Berlin the extent of the furor that had been created abroad when the announcement was made regarding Himmler's new role in prisoner of war affairs. Realizing the negative impact this could have on Germany's image and the possible reprisals it could bring against German soldiers in Allied hands, Berger took extra pains to dissociate the SS from the prisoner of war system. First, he located the Office of Chief of Prisoner of War Affairs some three and one-half kilometers away from his main SS office, in spite of the fact that he knew that this arrangement would involve considerable inconvenience for him in the management of prisoner of war affairs. Second, he refused to bring any SS members into the prisoner of war system. Rather, he brought into his office the entire Abt Organization as it then existed with its full delineation of duties and its full

⁴⁶Testimony of General Gottlob Berger, Trials, XIII, 59.

complement of personnel. His main purpose in doing so was, in his words, "to break all enemy propaganda which might arise from such an act [as the incorporating of large numbers of SS personnel into the prisoner of war system]."⁴⁷

Ironically, he convinced very few people that the SS did not now have full control of prisoner of war affairs, but in the process of trying to do so he achieved much that was beneficial to the prisoners. On October 1, 1944, Himmler theoretically did gain full control of the prison camps and at that point could have robbed them of their separate Army, Navy, and Air Force identities by infusing SS personnel into the prison camp system. Berger's precautions effectively prevented all such efforts and ensured the continuing control of the respective service personnel. Accordingly, when the Prosecution at Nuremberg asked whether Himmler's takeover of prisoner of war affairs meant the systematic "inhuman treatment and destruction of Allied prisoners of war . . . by the SS," Friedrich Karl von Eberstein, a high SS official, was able to reply that it did not since the camp commanders of the Armed Forces continued to be responsible for the running and administration of the camps from the inside, and that the task assigned to the SS was restricted solely to that of security, which began only outside the camps.⁴⁸

These measures did not, however, entirely eradicate the danger the security forces posed to the prisoners. Prisoners who fell into the hands of the SS and Gestapo outside the confines of the camps were

⁴⁷Ibid., 59-62.

⁴⁸Testimony of Friedrich Karl von Eberstein, August 5, 1946, IMT, XX, 306.

still likely to be mistreated or even killed. And in the fall of 1944 Himmler transferred to the Higher SS and Police Leaders the responsibility for safeguarding prisoner of war camps against mass escapes and against attempts from the outside to liberate prisoners. For this purpose, he made them the senior commanders of the prisoners of war in each defense area.⁴⁹

Their assignment, however, was another largely hollow gesture. The individuals who held these posts were already heavily burdened with duties and in most cases were given only one extra officer to handle the new responsibilities pertaining to prisoners of war, and he was usually an army man obtained from the existing staff of the Commander of Prisoner of War Affairs in the military district. In the final analysis, British Intelligence concluded, the involvement of the SS and Police Leaders in this fashion had little practical effect on the lives of the prisoners.⁵⁰

One final element in the chain of command must be briefly mentioned—the Parteikanzlei (Party Chancellery) of the Nazi Party. Ordinarily party functionaries should have no part in prisoner of war affairs since such matters are essentially a military concern, but this

⁴⁹An interesting and revealing maneuver took place in this regard. According to custom and international law, police officials are not supposed to be used to guard prisoners of war since war prisoners are not considered criminals. Since the Higher SS and Police Leaders were police officials, Himmler solved the problem by taking them over en masse into the Waffen-SS where they were automatically appointed generals. Testimony of von Eberstein, August 5, 1946, IMT, XX, 306. This is a classic example of what is meant when it is said that the Germans adhered to the letter if not the spirit of the law in caring for prisoners from the West.

⁵⁰"The Kriegsgefangenenwesen," 5. This did not, however, diminish the dangers posed for any escapers who fell into the hands of the SS and Gestapo after their departure from the camps.

was not the case in Nazi Germany. Officially the Party was represented in prisoner of war affairs at the level of General Reinicke's General Armed Forces Office in O.K.W. Any suggestions or orders which came up from lower levels to Reinicke's office for approval could and frequently were vetoed or changed by the Party Chancellor.⁵¹ And oftentimes orders and decisions affecting prisoners originated in the Nazi Party and were passed down through the chain of command where little could be done but to comply with them.⁵² Both official and unofficial channels permitted Party interference at all levels, beginning with Hitler at the top and extending down to the smallest local officials. Reference to unwanted interference appear frequently in the written record. In Keitel's words,

The Party-Chancellery, the German Labor Front and and the Ministry of Propaganda likewise were included in this purely military question. The O.K.W. was engaged in a constant struggle with all these agencies, which for the most part had more influence on Hitler than the O.K.W.⁵³

The shooting in the spring of 1944 of fifty of the seventy-six escaped prisoners from Stalag Luft III serves as a prime example of the power and influence exercised over prisoners by forces outside the established prisoner of war system. The fate of these men was determined primarily by persons outside the normal channels and involved only one individual in the prisoner of war chain of command, Hitler himself. The remainder of the effort came from individuals like Himmler who were not yet legally associated with prisoners.

⁵¹Ibid., 7.

⁵²Datner, Crimes Against POWs, xxvii.

⁵³Final Defense Plea of Wilhelm Keitel, Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, Supp. B, 266.

In conclusion, the German prisoner of war system was directed by a complex and nebulous command structure. Ample provisions existed within the chain of command for observing the requirements set forth in the Geneva Convention as is evidenced by the existence of offices charged with the responsibility of dealing with such matters as inspections by neutral observers, food, health, and transportation.⁵⁴ Avenues were equally available for circumventing these offices. And circumvented they were, not only by Party officials but also by numerous individuals and agencies both within and outside the O.K.W. offices who judged themselves above the law.⁵⁵

And yet, it is to the command structure that we must initially point if we are to answer the question of how it was possible for Leviathan to function in Stalag Luft III. The answer lies in the unique fashion in which the Luftwaffe camps were segregated within the prisoner of war system. They apparently were separated in a spirit of chivalry, or at least over concerns of reciprocity for German

⁵⁴ See Figure 1. In addition, the Prisoner of War Affairs Office in O.K.W. served as the legislator and control organ for the entire prisoner of war apparatus. It published a basic directive applicable to all three services. This directive, KGV-38 (Prisoner of War Regulation 38) contained all the clauses in the existing international agreements and the provisions for carrying them out. According to General Keitel, every department down to the smallest unit had this directive and every soldier, to a point, received instructions regarding its meaning and application. Furthermore, courses of instruction were instituted in Vienna for the purpose of offering special training for those especially charged with the care of prisoners of war. And finally, every soldier had a leaflet in his pay book which instructed him on proper conduct toward prisoners of war. This information was offered to the Tribunal by General Wilhelm Keitel and his defense attorney, Dr. Nelte, August 4, 1946, IMT, X, 553-54.

⁵⁵ Instances too numerous to mention are fully outlined in Datner's work. Additional cases will be discussed in the coming chapters of this study.

airmen who fell into the hands of the British and Americans. Once established on a separate basis, these camps never lost the privilege of being administered by Luftwaffe personnel. It would be hard to prove conclusively that this arrangement in itself accounts for the somewhat better treatment accorded to the prisoners in Stalag Luft III. It does not seem unreasonable, however, to speculate that the common backgrounds, interests, and professional training known to both the captors and the captives in these camps all served to foster mutual interests and cooperation within recognized limits. Furthermore, the mere fact that Luftwaffe administration was exercised within the general confines of military authority was significant. For, although abundant evidence exists indicating that O.K.W. offices were involved in numerous crimes against prisoners of war, no one, to the author's knowledge, has yet suggested that the prisoners would have been better off under SS or Gestapo control than under that of the military. All the evidence suggests that if the SS and Gestapo organizations had gained control of the prisoners little if any heed whatever would have been given to the provisions of the Geneva Convention.

The explanation of how Leviathan was able to make her presence felt in Stalag Luft III is now clear. The question remains as to how well she was able to operate within the camp. In evaluating her successes and failure, we must constantly remind ourselves of what has just been said about the prisoner of war system and the chain of command through which it functioned. Everything considered, this system was still a monster by the very nature of its faults and existence within Behemoth's realm. And one of the features that made the system a

a monster was the sheer magnitude of its operations, the huge numbers of prisoners held in Germany.

Scale of Operations

During a secret midnight conference held on April 3, 1945, just outside Berlin in the Headquarters Office of Obergruppenfuhrer and Lieutenant General-SS Gottlob Berger, two high ranking American prisoners of war who had been quietly brought to Berlin by Berger learned from him that Germany boasted of having over ten million prisoners of war within her borders.⁵⁶ Considering the late date in the war, General Berger's estimate may have been too high, and it is doubtful that the correct figure will ever be known.⁵⁷

⁵⁶This figure was recalled by General Delmar T. Spivey, one of the four men who were present at the meeting, and included in a draft of an article prepared for Air Force Magazine which discusses the conference with Berger. This conference is discussed in Chapter XIII of this study also. The article, with the above figure editorially deleted, appeared in the September 1975 issue, 115-20.

⁵⁷Insights into the difficulty of ascertaining correct figures can be gleaned from a report issued by the American Legation in Bern, Switzerland during the war. When that office attempted to gather accurate statistics on the number of American prisoners of war in German hands, it found that the Germans had frequently omitted the count in certain camps. This fact, the Legation concluded, explained why the indicated number of prisoners in German hands in July 1944 was less than that reported for June of that same year. They gave three possible reasons for the omissions; the Germans only submitted figures readily available to them; they omitted figures because of the chaotic conditions which led to the loss of records; and finally, they neglected to report accurate statistics because of their failure to judge such information important. Bern to Department of State, May 15, 1944. File 711.62114 A/539 ["United States Prisoners of War Detained by Germany"], Record Group 59 [Diplomatic Branch, National Archives]. General Berger's figure is questionable not because Germany had never dealt with such large numbers of Allied prisoners, for she most probably had that many and more under her control at various junctures during the war, but because by April 1945, Allied armies had overrun great expanses of German occupied territory and liberated untold numbers of former prisoners.

The number of prisoners of war held by Germany at different times varied, as one would expect. Thus, in October 1942 we find a set of statistics passed along by the American Red Cross to the State Department which indicate that Germany then held approximately four and three quarter million prisoners of war. Of these, 1,742,287 were British, Belgian, Polish, Yugoslavian, and French, and the remaining 3,000,000 were Russians.⁵⁸ Almost two and one half years later, another set of figures indicated that as of February 1, 1945, the Germans held 1,375,007 prisoners from the West and 748,395 from the East.⁵⁹ The figure pertaining to Russian prisoners is, of course, much too low, but the confused state of affairs on the Eastern Front at that time easily explains the error. The statistic on the number of prisoners from the West is interesting, however, since it is considerably higher than the 320,000 figure cited to Hitler by General Berger, which we noted above. Perhaps the best explanation for the difference here is the absence of clear statements as to exactly which nationalities are included in the group.

Another way of gaining an appreciation of the magnitude of the German prisoner of war system is to look at the physical plant it encompassed. The map in Figure 2 adequately depicts the far-flung empire in which the prisoners dwelt. It must be remembered that the locations indicated on the map represent only the major base camps,

⁵⁸C. E. MacEachran, Relief to Prisoners of War, American Red Cross to Mr. Bernard Gufler, Special Division, Department of State, File 740.00114 EW 1939/2892 ["Prisoners of War-European War, 1939"], Record Group 59 [Diplomatic Branch, National Archives].

⁵⁹"Strengths of Prisoner of War Camps in Germany as Known to SHAEF-PWX on 1 February 1945, 17, File 740.00114 EW 1939/2-2645, Record Group 59. Hereinafter cited as "Strengths of Prisons."

hospitals, and three civilian internee camps. In addition to these places, there were hundreds of small work detachments and detention points too numerous and mobile for inclusion on a map such as the one included here.

The figures vary, but the impression they leave is unmistakable—Germany operated a gigantic prisoner of war system. Despite its great size at most times the system was insufficient for the demands placed upon it. Although plans were made before the war relative to the care of prisoners of war,⁶⁰ it is unlikely that Germany anticipated the capture of such large numbers of prisoners. Certain segments of the prisoner population fared better than others, and the first prisoners to enter a new camp usually found plenty of space for their use. In time, however, almost every camp became crowded and exceeded its capacity. Some representative samples of overcrowding are:

NAME	HOLDING CAPACITY	KNOWN OCCUPANCY
Stalag Luft I	900	5,108
Stalag Luft IV	6,400	8,861
Stalag II D	5,000	38,732
Stalag IV B	12,000	24,015
Stalag Luft III	5,000	9,990
Stalag VIII A	3,500	38,337
Stalag VIII C	2,500	41,589
Stalag XVII A	2,500	30,700 ⁶¹

In summary, the German prisoner of war system exhibited many faces. The most prominent ones were those which displayed the wholly inconsistent policies Germany adopted toward prisoners from the East

⁶⁰Datner, Crimes Against POWs, 1.

⁶¹"Strengths of Prisons," 1, 4, 7, 12.

and those from the West. The complex command structure which controlled the prisoner of war system explains how such inconsistent policies could be executed side by side. But while the Wehrmacht was guilty of participating in some of the worst crimes possible against prisoners of war, it was also the instrument whereby Leviathan was able to function in a system otherwise tortured by Behemoth's rule.

Stalag Luft III was favored in that it was a military rather than a civilian camp, and under Luftwaffe control. What this meant in the daily lives of the prisoners will be fully outlined in the coming chapters. While it has already been suggested that the prisoners interned there fared better than most of the others captured by Germany, it must never be forgotten that all assessments of their treatment are given in relative terms. The prisoners of Stalag Luft III were still subjected to innumerable evils that long should have passed from the scene of warfare according to the dictates of custom and international law. Examples of a few of the problems they encountered are cited in the next chapter, which traces the route usually taken by downed airmen as they were shuffled through the German prisoner of war system from the point of shootdown until they arrived in a permanent camp.

CHAPTER IV

FROM COCKPIT TO PRISON CAMP

Introduction

The Killing and maiming of people in combat is an inevitable part of warfare. So is the taking of prisoners. But the average soldier is usually far better acquainted with the first two acts than he is with the latter. He sees wounds and death inflicted upon those around him. Consequently, he adjusts his thinking to the reality of such morbidities and makes various preparations for dealing with them if they should affect his own life. But seldom does he have occasion to dwell upon or encounter captivity until it happens to him personally. Thus, for the combat fliers, captivity possessed an air of unreality that only added to the trauma of being shot out of the skies and, possibly in a wounded condition, descending into hostile surroundings. This placed the downed airman at a serious disadvantage when it came to meeting the challenges that lie before him as a prisoner.

The reception given Allied fliers in the European theater varied, depending on the stage of the war and the attitudes of the people who captured or otherwise had access to them. Soon after capture every prisoner underwent some form of interrogation. Most fliers did not encounter skilled interrogators until they reached Dulag Luft, a central interrogation center for all crewmen captured in the

European theater.

Dulag Luft was a boon for German intelligence. It was a worrisome and trying place for a captured flier. There the Germans manipulated, cajoled, threatened, and sometimes abused the prisoner in an effort to extract from him more information than his own government authorized him to give. By and large, however, the interrogators obtained the information they desired without resorting to physical force and even without the airman being aware of his compliance.

The prisoner felt relieved when told that his sojourn at Dulag Luft was over and that he was being sent to a permanent prisoner of war camp. Anxious moments awaited him, however, as he faced the lengthy journey through enemy territory, entailing as it did the possibility of ill-treatment by irate citizens, attacks by Allied aircraft, and growing apprehensions about attempting escape or accepting an extended stay behind barbed wire.

The Last Mission

The story of the prisoners held in Stalag Luft III rightfully begins with an account of the circumstances which brought them there: the extensive periods of time during which they became familiar with military life, underwent flight training, joined their combat units, experienced orientation missions, and finally encountered the enemy in the air and on the ground. Out of all these experiences, however, the memories of the last mission, the one which led to their capture, usually remained most vivid in the prisoners' minds. And understandably so, for during that flight the airmen found themselves utilizing every ounce of courage, skill, discipline, and training at their disposal in a split second battle for survival.

It is important to recognize the commonality of the experiences shared by the downed aviators. They knew aerial combat firsthand and had seen their bunkmates and buddies get maimed and killed. As their ranks thinned, they pondered the odds against their survival. Then the day arrived when they too became a casualty. But to them the experience was a very personal one, a traumatic encounter to be remembered the rest of their lives, the subject of many nightmares, and the topic of much conversation in the days ahead. Virtually every airman who had been shot out of the skies had felt that the few crisis-filled moments after his craft was disabled would be his last. Therefore, most of them considered themselves fortunate merely to be alive when they reached the ground.

The men who ended up in Stalag Luft III had survived an inferno that had taken the lives of many among their ranks: they had all experienced a close brush with death, a fact which served as a common denominator between them. This explains in part the sense of unity and camaraderie that existed among them as fliers and, one suspects, the close cooperation, mutual respect and self-esteem that in so many instances characterized their stay together as prisoners.

Capture

The crewmen exchanged a familiar world for an unfamiliar one when they departed from their aircraft. As they slipped through the door, a blast of cold air shocked them into a new awareness, and during the descent many thoughts occupied their minds. But as the ground rose up to meet them their attention was increasingly drawn to the additional crises that lie before them.

Airmen dreaded the thought of landing near the target they had

just attacked. Usually they were able to remain with the aircraft long enough to travel some distance from the area they had bombed or strafed. But there was still the problem of avoiding anyone who might observe the descending chute, for everyone on the ground had to be considered hostile when the landing occurred in enemy territory. Whenever possible, the falling fliers pulled the shrouds of their parachutes in an effort to let escaping air direct the path of their descent. In this way they sought to avoid immediate capture and gain some time in which to initiate evasive action and make contact with the underground or other friendly elements among the local populace. This maneuver seldom proved sufficient, however, and as they neared the ground the crewmen could usually observe people converging on their position.

It made some difference as to who was first upon the scene, soldiers or civilians. If soldiers arrived first, capture was imminent, but the flier's safety was usually assured. If the first contact was with one or more civilians, the chance remained that the flier might be spirited off to a secure hiding place and provided with food and shelter. More likely it meant capture and detention until local police or military personnel arrived. But on some occasions it meant physical torture with clubs and pitchforks¹ or death by

¹Germany was not unique in this regard. Even in England the crowds sometimes became unruly. In March 1941, the German submarine U-99 was forced to the surface by depth charges in the Atlantic. The crew was taken captive and transported to Liverpool. Word of their arrival preceded them and as they were marched toward an interrogation center a sizeable crowd gathered. Liverpool people had suffered from the blockade, had lost citizens in ships sunk by submarines, and had seen the dead and wounded brought from other ships which had been struck by submarines. The crew literally walked the gauntlet when the crowd released its pent-up fury. Attacking with brooms, pokers, shovels, and

lynching at the hands of irate citizens not accustomed to the self-control exercised by most members of the military in regard to captives.

From the spring and summer of 1944 until the end of the war disturbing reports began to sift through the foreign and domestic press and official communication channels indicating that Allied fliers were being beaten and lynched by the German populace with the full approval and encouragement of the German government. On May 17, 1944, an American pilot was brought before an assembly of Nazi Party officials at Altlußdersdorf and subjected to insults, public curiosity, and violence. Finally a German official asked, "Is there a manure pitchfork available to kill this individual?"² Several days later, Dr. Paul Josef Goebbels, Hitler's Propaganda Chief, issued a front-page editorial in the May 27 edition of Voelkischer Beobachter charging that Anglo-American air attacks over Germany were no longer warfare but murder pure and simple. He asserted:

It is only possible with the aid of arms to secure the lives of enemy pilots who were shot down during such attacks, for they would otherwise be killed by the sorely tried population It seems to us hardly possible and tolerable to

garden forks the crowd belabored both the crew and the police who tried to stop them. In the end the party had to make a run for nearby Walton Jail. As one of the policemen noted in apologizing to a crewman whose nose had been broken in the fracas, "Sorry, old boy, they're usually very nice people." A. J. Barker, Prisoners of War (New York: Universe Books, 1975), 58. It should be noted that this was apparently an isolated incident, that no deaths resulted, and that the British government neither condoned nor encouraged the action. It is, therefore, a considerably different incident than the ones which occurred in Germany.

²State Department to American Legation, Bern, August 10, 1944. File 711.62114A/7-2544 ["United States Prisoners of War Detained by Germany"], Record Group 59 [Diplomatic Branch, National Archives]. No information is available on the flier's fate.

use German police and soldiers against the German people when it treats murderers of children as they deserve.³

And on May 30, 1944, Martin Bormann issued a circular letter admitting that British and American fliers had in fact been lynched by the German population. He stated:

Several instances have occurred where members of the crews of such aircraft, who have bailed out or who have made forced landings, were lynched on the spot immediately after capture by the populace, which was incensed to the highest degree.⁴

³International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg, Trial of the Major Criminals before the International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg, 14 November - 1 October 1946 (Nuremberg, Germany: Secretariat of the International Military Tribunal, 1948), IV, 50. Hereinafter cited as IMT; New York Times, May 27, 1944. In November 1943 the Germans reportedly found an excellent propaganda item which, if true, reveals unnecessary antagonism on the part of a flier. Widely publicized throughout Germany as "typical of the cynical American youth which is destroying Europe's cultural monuments," this young airman had stenciled the name of his plane, "Murder, Inc.," on his jacket, the sight of which led to especial resentment by the German people and government. J. Stafford Redding, Special War Problems Division, to Mr. Cordell Hull, Department of State, December 29, 1943, File 711.62114A/195, Record Group 59.

⁴IMT, IV, 51. For specific information received by the State Department regarding individual cases of beatings, torture, and killings of airmen immediately after capture by civilians, military, and police personnel, see official correspondence in Record Group 59, File Nos. 711.62114A/7-2444, 711.62114A/589, and 711.62114A/6-1644. The latter also contains summaries of press reports from Sweden deploring the German action. The tone of these reports is revealed in the following excerpt: "It is not the first time the popular German wrath has found such spontaneous expression immediately after apprehensions to such effect have been pronounced by German leaders: one need only recall the frightful massacre of Jews, which the efficient German police were powerless to check, after the young Jew Grynspan murdered a German diplomatic official in Paris before the war. Therefore, nobody doubts the humanitarian basis of the German people's righteous wrath. Perish the thought! Unfortunately, it must be said that this righteous and noble wrath has awakened somewhat belatedly. It was not provoked by the incidents of Guernica, Coventry and Lidice for example, and in fact the nature of the German regime in the occupied countries has not succeeded in provoking any other feelings than pride and joy in the German breast. The terror bombing, which has now provoked such violent

The prohibition against military and police involvement in the rescue of downed airmen from hostile crowds received its strongest endorsement on February 25, 1945, when Albert Hoffmann, a National Defense Commissioner in Westfalen addressed all county councilors, mayors, police officials, county leaders, and county chiefs of the Volksstrum in the following language:

Fighter-bomber pilots who are shot down are in principle not to be protected against the fury of the people. I expect from all police officers that they will refuse to lend their protection to these gangster types. Authorities acting in contradiction to the popular sentiment will have to account to me. All police and gendarmerie officials are to be informed immediately of this, my attitude.⁵

German officials were fully aware that such policy statements were an open invitation to murder and that they represented gross violations of Article Two of the 1929 Geneva Convention which reads in part:

Prisoners of war are in the power of the hostile Power, but not of the individuals or corps who have captured them. They must at all times be humanely treated and protected, particularly against acts of violence, insults and public curiosity.

After several airmen had been killed, Nazi leaders attempted to rationalize their position by noting that "the German authorities are not

reaction on the part of the German people is nothing other than the application of German methods against the Germans themselves." Swedish editorial in the June 1 edition of Aftontidningen as quoted in Ibid.

⁵As quoted in IMT, IV, 51.

directly responsible, since death . . . occurred, before a German official became concerned with the case."⁶ Furthermore, these same Nazi officials were confident they could doctor the evidence for the newspapers and depict the affair in "an appropriate manner" by noting, among other things, that the dead airmen had indeed been "terror fliers."⁷

To assist them in this propaganda effort, they carefully outlined specific acts which identified crewmen as "terror fliers." They included:

1. Attacks with aircraft armament on the civilian population, whether on individuals or crowds;
2. Firing on our own (German) air crews while suspended by parachute after having been shot down;
3. Attacks with aircraft armament against passenger trains engaged in public transportation;
4. Attacks with aircraft armament on military hospitals, and hospital trains which are clearly marked with the Red Cross.⁸

In practice, however, little effort was made to determine if a particular aircraft had indeed been involved in such actions. As Ambassador Ritter noted: "In the cases of lynching, the precise establishment of the circumstances deserving punishment, according to points 1-4 . . . , is not very essential."⁹ They were, in fact, not the least bit essential, as indicated by Bormann's observation that, "No police measures

⁶ Ambassador Ritter to the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces, 20 June 1944, Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, III, 526.

⁷ Ibid., 56.

⁸ Chief of the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces to the Foreign Office, 15 June 1944, Ibid., 530.

⁹ Ambassador Ritter to the Chief of the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces, 20 June 1944, Ibid., 526.

or criminal proceedings were invoked against the German civilians who participated in these incidents."

Figures are unavailable concerning the number of crewmen who died violently at the hands of the lynch mobs. However, Allied fliers were very much aware of the danger to which they might be exposed should they fall into the hands of civilians, especially near the end of the war. And this awareness increased their sense of apprehension and fear as they faced their captors for the first time.

Usually, however, the prisoner received rather routine treatment. Once captured, he could expect to hear repeatedly the heavily accented stock German phrase, "Für you, da war ist ofer" (for you the war is over). And in the days ahead the prisoner became accustomed to hearing himself referred to as a "Kriegie," which was simply a shortened version of the German word for prisoner, "Kriegsgefangenen." The normal procedure was for the prisoner to be passed from hand to hand until he arrived at the main interrogation center, Dulag Luft. As one observer noted at the time, the prisoners were sent there "on foot, by train (first class, second class, third class, prison car or boxcar), by air, by submarine, by tank, and even, in some cases, by dog cart."¹⁰

Under certain circumstances a prisoner's path was directed to Fresnes interrogation center in Paris. This occurred most frequently when a downed flier was dressed in civilian clothes and, therefore, suspected of being a spy or saboteur. Or he could be sent there for

¹⁰ Lyman B. Burbank, "A History of the American Air Force Prisoners of War in Center Compound, Stalag Luft III, Germany" (thesis, University of Chicago, 1946), iv.

allegedly committing any of the terror acts mentioned above.¹¹

According to one German report, about 150 aviators who parachuted when their planes were brought down were arrested in civilian clothes and held at Fresnes Prison in the early months of 1944.¹² One airman who spent time in Fresnes before being sent to Stalag Luft III described conditions at the Paris interrogation center in the following words:

I was there . . . from June 24 til October 8, 1942. I was captured on June 11, 1942, in civilian clothes at Pontivy. The questions I was asked by the Germans mainly concerned information about the French civilians who had tried to help me escape. Regarding the war little was asked. In the prison we were four in a cell. The latter was very small and there was only one bed in it; the others slept on straw and sacks. There was no heating and only a small number of blankets. The ventilation and the lights were poor. The food was very bad. We received thin watery soup made with or from boiled cabbage, a few potatoes, 500 grams of bread daily and about 2 oz. of meat daily. We were supposed to get one hot bath every week but usually we had just a weekly cold shower. There were neither soap nor towels given out. As a rule we were taken out for exercise only once every week for about 15 to 20 minutes. The French Red Cross and Quakers sent food parcels, but these were very meagre and were divided between those in the cell. There was no physical violence.¹³

Apparently not everyone could make the statement about there being no violence at Fresnes, for the center had a reputation as being

¹¹Chief of the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces to Foreign Office, July 15, 1944, Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, III, 530.

¹²Mr. Bailey, Special War Problems Division, State Department, to Legal Division, State Department, May 31, 1944, Filed with 711.62114A/431, Record Group 59.

¹³American Legation, Bern, to U.S. Secretary of State, March 25, 1944. File No. 711.62114A/431, Record Group 59.

a place of horror for French political prisoners and members of the resistance. The Gestapo handled the interrogation there and reportedly subjected the prisoners to every form of inhumane treatment, including forcing them to clean out their own cells which reeked of decaying dead bodies.¹⁴

At any rate, the men who ended up at Fresnes or a civilian jail knew their chances of survival would be better if they could get themselves placed in Luftwaffe hands. And the Luftwaffe was anxious to secure the release from these places of men who claimed to be aviators. A case in point is that of Colonel Joe Miller, a downed flier who managed to make contact with the French Underground but was captured at the Spanish border. He was taken to a civilian jail and became painfully aware that his cellmates, almost without exception, were either political prisoners or captured Allied agents. He had nothing to corroborate his claim that he was an aviator and believed the Gestapo's threat that he would be treated as a spy. An account of how he was saved from this fate reads as follows:

¹⁴"Dulag Luft," 22. This is an anonymous manuscript that was sent by 1/Lt Stanley L. Webster, Jr. of the 513th Intelligence Corps Group, Camp King, Germany (the new name given to Dulag Luft after its occupation by American forces), to Lt. Col. James H. Keefe, Jr. at the latter's request. A xerox copy of the manuscript is found in the Spivey Collection [Special Collections Room, USAF Academy Library, Colorado]. An edited version of this same manuscript appeared in Aerospace Historian, 19 (June 1972), 58-62. An editorial note at the beginning of the article reads as follows: "The material for this article came from an anonymous manuscript recovered from Germany after World War II. So far as Aerospace Historian can determine, it has not previously been published." Because the Aerospace Historian's version is an edited account, however, I have chosen to utilize the original manuscript and will not cite the published version even though the material used may also be found in it.

He finally remembered the name of a German pilot he had met in the Philippines almost ten years before. A German flying boat making a round-the-world flight had run out of fuel and ditched in the sea off Manila. Miller had piloted the aircraft that rescued the German crew. When Colonel Miller stated the name of the Luftwaffe officer he noted an immediate reaction from the Gestapo. Within the hour a large limousine arrived and transported him to Dulag Luft. Miller was worried; it was dark when he arrived and his own mother wouldn't have recognized him. He was pale and emaciated with a heavy growth of beard.

The Gestapo took him directly to the camp commandant's office. Colonel Miller was dumbstruck when the door opened and the commandant said in English: "Ah! yes, come in Joe." He then disdainfully dismissed the Gestapo with the words: "I'll take care of this man, off with you." As soon as the door was closed, however, the commandant turned to Colonel Miller and inquired, "Now just who in the hell are you?"¹⁵

Dulag Luft maintained a number of "branch offices," notably in Holland, western and northern France and at Verona. When a crash occurred in the neighborhood of one of these branch offices, the prisoners were interrogated by the branch manager who thereafter separated them into two groups. Those prisoners whom he felt possessed certain technical knowledge or were otherwise considered important were sent on to Dulag Luft where they were subjected to more intensive questioning. The airmen who appeared to possess little information of special value were sent directly to a permanent camp.¹⁶ But the number of men who were processed through these branch camps was apparently

¹⁵As related by Lieutenant General A. P. Clark in James L. Cole, Jr., ed., "Dulag Luft Recalled and Revisited," Aerospace Historian, 19 (June 1972), 64. Colonel Miller remained in Luftwaffe hands throughout the remainder of his stay in captivity.

¹⁶"Auswertestelle West," A.D.I. (K) Report No. 328/1945, Frame 0468. [Microfilm Roll No. A5405, Newspaper and Microform Room, Louisiana State University Library, Baton Rouge, Louisiana].

quite small, as little is said about them in official correspondence or elsewhere.

Dulag Luft

Dulag Luft was the popular name given to an interrogation center located near the town of Oberursel north of Frankfurt am Main. The designation was actually an abbreviation for the German title Durchgangslager Fur Luftwaffe (transit camp for the Air Force).¹⁷

Originally designed as an agricultural experiment farm, Dulag Luft was located away from the hustle of the city at the foot of the Taunus Mountains.¹⁸ To get there most prisoners traveled first to Frankfurt and then another ten miles in a northwesterly direction by train to Oberursel, a small town with a population of about 20,000 persons. Once there, the prisoners boarded a local tram which made the trip out to the camp almost hourly. If the tram had just left the station, the prisoners were marched on foot toward the camp, a distance of about two and one-half miles which took them past an American-looking Shell Oil Company filling station replete with Coca Cola signs. The weary men usually noticed the water spigot at the station and stopped for a drink, only to be hastily chased away by an old woman who habitually posted herself nearby.¹⁹

¹⁷"Dulag Luft," 1.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹A.D.I. (K) Report No. 328, Frame No. 0468; Bob Broach, "The Last Mission," (unpublished manuscript, 1943), 14, in the author's possession. One prisoner recalls the gas station as being an Esso station, Delmar T. Spivey, "History of Center Compound" (unpublished manuscript, 1946), 20, Spivey Collection, hereinafter cited as "History."

Upon arrival at the gates of Dulag Luft, the prisoners could be channeled in several directions, depending upon the physical layout of the camp at various junctures in the war. In September 1939, the Army took over the facilities of the experimental farm and used the entire complex to house a few French prisoners. Control of the camp was transferred to the Air Force in December 1939. It soon became apparent that a high percentage of the downed airmen would need medical attention, and a portion of Hohemark Hospital, located about one mile west of the camp, was requisitioned for their treatment. Altogether, about sixty-five beds were reserved for wounded prisoners. A number of private rooms in the hospital were also set aside where high-ranking Allied prisoners could be interrogated in circumstances which the Germans reportedly considered appropriate to their respective ranks. The hospital had been a private sanitarium and was, therefore, well equipped and surrounded by a beautiful park. Then, in early 1940 four wooden barracks were constructed across the road from the interrogation center to house the overflow of prisoners who had undergone interrogation and were awaiting shipment to a permanent camp.

These facilities soon proved inadequate, and the transit portion of the camp was moved on September 10, 1943, from Oberursel to the edge of a park known as the Palmengarten (Palm Gardens) in the very center of a residential section of Frankfurt. Even more significant was the fact that this change placed it only 1635 yards northwest of the main railroad station, a location which was an Allied target area and, therefore, endangered the prisoners' lives. This transfer was in violation of Article Nine of the Geneva Convention which prohibited the housing of prisoners in combat zones. Evidence that Germany considered

the city of Frankfurt susceptible to enemy attack is shown by the fact that its citizens were being systematically evacuated from this and other urban centers at this time.²⁰ The anticipated consequences were not long in coming: in March 1944 a bombing attack on Frankfurt destroyed the transit camp facilities and reportedly killed one or two prisoners.

The transit camp was, accordingly, moved again, this time to a facility located approximately two miles northwest of Wetzlar, a small town on the Lahn River about thirty miles north of Frankfurt. As happened when the Frankfurt prison camp first opened, the prisoners had to stay in tents for a time until the new facility could be constructed.²¹

The acquisition of additional facilities and the relocations of the transit camps created some confusion regarding the proper name of the camp. Originally, the term "Dulag Luft" was used to designate the interrogation center proper and the transit camp across the road.

²⁰More will be said later about the concept of placing prisoners of war in the center of cities as a means of warding off enemy air attacks. This became a serious threat in late 1944 and 1945, but it is not clear if the prisoners were placed in Frankfurt for this or some other reason.

²¹A.D.I. (K) Report No. 328, Frame Nos. 0461-0463: "Dulag Luft," 6; American Embassy in Berlin to Department of State, November 8, 1941, File No. 740.00114EW/2247 ["Prisoners of War-European War, 1939"], Record Group 59 [Diplomatic Branch, National Archives]; International Red Cross report of March 4, 1943, File No. 740.00114EW/3977, Record Group 59; Bern to Secretary of State, May 23, 1944, File No. 711.62114-A/565, Record Group 59; Camp Report No. 6, Dulag Luft, June 12, 1944, File No. 711.62114A A.I.R./6-1244 ["Reports for Inspection of Camps for American Prisoners in Germany"], Record Group 59 [Diplomatic Branch, National Archives]; Cole, "Dulag Luft," 65; "American Prisoners of War in Germany" prepared by Military Intelligence Service, War Department, 1 November, 1945, 5, copy in Archives Division, National Red Cross Headquarters Building, Washington, D.C.

After the Germans launched their attack against Russia, a similar interrogation center was opened in the East and became known as Auswertestelle Ost (Evaluation Center-East). Accordingly, the interrogation center near Oberursel was given the new name Auswertestelle West (Evaluation Center-West),²² and the name Dulag Luft thereafter should have been used only to designate the transit camps at their various locations, first across the road from the interrogation center, then at Frankfurt, and finally at Wetzlar.²³ The Americans, however, continued to refer to the entire complex as Dulag Luft without distinguishing between the interrogation center and the transit camps. It was natural for them to do so since it was a conveniently short term which everyone seemed to feel identified an experience as well as a place.

Shortly after the war began, stories and reports filtered back to Allied intelligence about the German apparatus near Oberursel. In time the news was disseminated to the crews, and the combination of factual information and rumored effectiveness of the evaluation center created an almost superstitious dread among the Allied fliers of what would happen to them at the Center.²⁴

²²William W. Ingenhutt, "Something was Missing," (thesis, Air Command and Staff School, the Air University, Maxwell AFB, Alabama, 1948), 61.

²³A.D.I. (K) Report No. 328, Frame No. 0462. Around April 15, 1945, the interrogation center was moved to Nurnberg-Buchenbuhl, but the organization had by this time deteriorated to the point that it no longer deserved to be called an evaluation center. Ibid., Frame No. 0461.

²⁴A.D.I. (K) Report No. 328, Frame No. 0461.

What did they actually find at Dulag Luft? According to some reports, conditions were exceptionally good at Dulag Luft. They stated that there were never more than four men in a room, and often only two; that there were hot showers in the barracks; that a separate barracks was set apart as a communal dining hall; that a communal sitting room with upholstered chairs was provided; that Red Cross supplies were more plentiful there than at other camps and that gala dinners of four or five courses were given at least twice a month during the early years to prevent stocks of parcels from accumulating; that the wines and spirits liberated by the Germans during their advance into France were given to the prisoners as long as the stocks lasted; that until 1942 birthday parties were quite common at which there was a choice of white wine, claret or whiskey; that during the first two winters some of the prisoners went skiing in the nearby mountains with German officers; that in the summer parties occasionally went out into the woods to collect berries and firewood; and finally, that parole walks and visits to church took place every week.²⁵

The only problem with this portrayal is that it leaves too much unsaid. It does not reveal that these concessions were but a part of the total environment designed to snare the unwary and bewildered captive and to cause him to revise his preconceived notions of the cruel Huns and sap him of his aggressive spirit. These conditions existed in the transit camp near Oberursel and to a lesser degree at Frankfurt and Wetzlar, but not in the interrogation center. Furthermore, these

²⁵Inspection Report of the International Red Cross, March 4, 1943, File No. 711.62114A/3977, Record Group 59; "Dulag Luft," 29, 31.

luxuries were enjoyed primarily during the early years of the war, and were of long-term benefit only to the few prisoners who served as part of the permanent staff at Dulag Luft.²⁶ This meant that most of the prisoners retained far more vivid memories of the unpleasant atmosphere in the interrogation center than they did of the few days respite in the transit camp with its ever increasing favors.

An appreciation of the conditions and circumstances the prisoners encountered in the interrogation center can be obtained by tracing the path of the prisoners from the time they passed through the gates on their way in until they were released to the custody of the transit camp. After the guard who escorted the prisoners to the camp secured a receipt for their delivery, the captives were placed in the hands of a Reception Office. Usually, the first task of the reception staff was to attempt to get the prisoners to reveal their identity by ordering the officer prisoners to step forward and the "other ranks" to line up behind their officers "to insure that they would not be separated and to allow them to go to the same camp."²⁷ If this ruse worked, and it apparently often did, the Germans had achieved an important first step in the interrogation process; knowledge of who belonged with whom on the various crews was a valuable tool in the interrogator's hands for reasons which will soon become clear.

The prisoners then filed into the Transport Office one by one where some personal information was noted and each man thoroughly

²⁶"Dulag Luft," 31. For an extended narrative of the role played by the permanent staff and an explanation of German aims and techniques in providing such care at Dulag Luft, see Sydney Smith, Mission Escape (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1969), 21-52.

²⁷A.D.I. (K) Report No. 328, Frame No. 0469.

searched. All clothing down to their underwear was removed and very methodically gone through for weapons, escape aids, and personal property such as papers, pictures, and money. While dressing again, the prisoner saw his comb, cigarettes, matches, money, etc., placed in an envelope with his name on it and was assured that the items would be returned to him later. Next he was photographed and fingerprinted.

The airmen were removed from the Transport Office and placed in one of three likely locations²⁸—the transit camp, the "snake pit," or in a solitary confinement cell, depending upon the number of prisoners on hand at any one time. At the beginning of the war, virtually all prisoners were sent directly into the interrogation center. But the influx of prisoners increased rapidly from the dozen or so that arrived during the month of December 1939 to an average of approximately 2,000 each month in 1944.²⁹ When all available space in the interrogation center was in use, the Germans channeled the excess prisoners to other places. One choice was to send them directly to the transit camp after a brief interrogation session, and this route was assigned to prisoners whom the Germans felt possessed little knowledge of value to them.³⁰

²⁸This cautious wording is necessary since Dulag Luft was susceptible to wartime needs just like the rest of Germany, and the disposition of the prisoners which passed through its facilities varied from time to time depending upon the number of men on hand at any one time and the facilities available. Exceptions were frequently made in the routine of handling prisoners and it would be impossible to account for them in terms of outlining all the possible experiences the prisoners encountered.

²⁹A.D.I. (K) Report No. 328, Frame No. 0467. The peak month was July 1944 when over three thousand Allied airmen and paratroopers passed through the center. Ibid. The following yearly totals, as listed in "Dulag Luft," 6, were: 1942, 3,000; 1943, 8,000; and 1944, 29,000.

³⁰Broach, "The Last Mission," 14.

If a prisoner appeared to be a valuable source of information, but could not be immediately placed in solitary confinement, he was often sent to the "snake pit," a one-story building used as a way station until room could be found in the main interrogation center. It was known as the "snake pit" because of its nightmarish features, its dirty and smelly rooms and vicious guards. The rooms were small, and contained only one iron bed, a small table, a few chairs, and a slop jar. The single window was closed and locked, and the solid wooden shutter which opened and closed from the outside was shut tight. The morning and evening meals usually consisted of one slice of very heavy black bread smeared with a tissue-paper thin coat of oleomargarine or ersatz jam, and a cup of lukewarm ersatz tea made from various kinds of hay and parched grain or ersatz coffee of unknown composition. The noon meal was a little more substantial, consisting of a large soup dish full of potato soup filled with large pieces of potatoes but no meat or fat. No one was allowed to shave or brush his teeth, and only after much shouting and pleading could a prisoner persuade a guard to let him out to use a filthy straddle latrine.³¹ Fortunately, the men remained in the "snake pit" for only a few days before being sent to the interrogation center.

The prisoners encountered a confusing array of conditions and forms of treatment in the interrogation center. After 1941 the most

³¹Spivey, "History," 21.

prominent feature of this portion of the complex was the "cooler."³² This structure contained some two hundred and forty solitary confinement cells, and it was into one of these that each prisoner was thrust without ceremony. This was to be his home for an undetermined period of time during which he was alternately cajoled, threatened, feasted, starved, treated with cigarettes and chocolate, or left to suffer the pains of nicotine fits and ponder his fate. All this was part of a sophisticated interrogation process which over the months and years developed from an inefficient and feeble attempt to obtain information in subtle ways during the early days of the war to an effective and thoroughgoing operation near the end which gave the Germans almost every bit of information they desired from the crews.

Different explanations have been given for the evaluation center's success in getting information from the prisoners. Some observers say the prisoners talked out of fear, or conversely, because of German kindness.³³ Others suggest that the captured airmen talked primarily because they had not been adequately impressed with the importance of remaining silent in their security training, or had not taken seriously the advice given during the training and briefing sessions. They were thus not prepared for the techniques used upon them

³² This term was used by both the Allies and the Germans to designate the solitary confinement cells found in prison camps throughout Germany. One German noted that it was easier to pronounce than the German term *Offiziersbesprechung*. Hanns Joachim Scharff, "Without Torture," *Argosy* (May 1950), 88.

³³ These two reasons were given by Generalmajor Alfred Toppe, "German Methods of Interrogating Prisoners of War in World War II," Office of the Chief of Military History, Historical Manuscript P-108a, June 1949, p. 10, and General Hasso von Manteuffel, interview, 29 July, 1970, cited by David Kahn, "World War II History: The Biggest Hole," *Military Affairs* 39 (April 1975), 75.

during interrogation and either consciously or unconsciously gave away important military secrets.³⁴ Hanns Scharff, an interrogator at Auswertestelle West, claims that the prisoners talked because the interrogation methods that the Germans used were "almost irresistible."³⁵ This had not always been the case, for in the early months of the war the entire effort at Dulag Luft appears to have been quite ineffective.

A visit to the center in 1941 by a German flier, Franz von-Werra, however, reportedly led to the introduction of new methods and techniques which greatly increased the efficiency and thoroughness of the center. Von-Werra had been shot down and captured in England and was put through the British equivalent of Dulag Luft, the British Air Interrogation Center at Cockfosters, before being sent to Canada where he was to be held as a prisoner of war. He escaped and made his way through the United States and Mexico and returned to Germany from South America. Upon his return to Germany, Goering sent for him and ordered him to visit all RAF prisoner of war camps in Germany. He concluded that the interrogations conducted at Dulag were superficial and reported back to Goering that he "would rather be interrogated by half a dozen German inquisitors than by one RAF expert." The formal report in which he recommended certain changes in the camp's procedures came back from Goering's desk with a notation upon it stating "--will be carried out." And in the end Dulag Luft did indeed

³⁴ An excellent discussion of the problems that obviously existed in this regard is found in Ingenhutt's study, which was based on information gathered from informal interrogations of between 1500 and 2500 American Officers and NCOs who, like himself, passed through Dulag Luft before being sent to Stalag Luft III. These informal interrogations were part of an internal camp intelligence effort which are discussed in detail in Chapters VIII and XI.

³⁵ Scharff, "Without Torture," 87.

adopt many of the organizational features and methods of interrogation utilized by the British.³⁶

Scharff's claim that the methods used were almost irresistible can be viewed more credibly if one remembers that the interrogation effort at Dulag Luft did not consist of a single act, that it was an extended engagement conducted by skillful men employing clever tactics concerning which the man being questioned was often totally unaware. A British report concluded that it was often possible for the Germans to disguise completely the combat character of the interrogation. When this was achieved, the prisoner, after exhaustive and usually productive interrogation, often wondered when the actual interrogation was going to begin.³⁷

The interrogation process began in an innocuous fashion. Usually a man pretending to be a Red Cross representative entered the prisoner's cell and asked him to fill out a lengthy form. After the Allies protested against such false practices, the interrogator's claim to being a Red Cross representative was dropped, but the illegal form continued to be used, apparently until the end of the war. According to the Geneva Convention, prisoners of war were obliged to give only their name, rank, and serial number. The forms asked for this information first, but gradually verged into areas of military interest. Most prisoners gave the required data, paused a little on the questions

³⁶Kendal Burt and James Leasor, The One that Got Away (London: Collins with Michael Joseph, 1956), 238-39.

³⁷A.D.I. (K) Report No. 388 ["German Methods and Experiences of Prisoner Interrogation," Microfilm Roll No. A5405, Newspaper and Microform Room, Louisiana State University Library, Baton Rouge, Louisiana].

about their home addresses, the names of next-of-kin, and civilian employment, and stopped writing altogether when they noticed questions asking for the number and location of their flying units and other military information.³⁸

The Germans made maximum use of this preliminary interrogation session. In addition to the information they may have obtained on the "Red Cross" form, the session gave them an opportunity to evaluate the prisoner's character. After leaving the cell, the man who conducted the session was often able to write telling statements which were helpful in later interrogations, such as "this man is a heavy smoker," or "this prisoner is unsure of himself and susceptible to flattery." Furthermore, at the point where the prisoner announced that he could not supply the requested information, the interrogator usually displayed a pained look and replied that this was unfortunate since further information was needed to prove the prisoner's claims that he was in fact a flier and not a spy or saboteur. He went on to add that he himself was sure the airman was telling the truth, but (in a lowered voice) that the Gestapo was not so easily convinced and that it had ways of securing the information it needed which the interrogator did not wish to think about, especially since he too was a military man of honor and understood such things in a way the security police did not. The object of this entire exchange was to impress upon the prisoner the importance of giving sufficient information to establish his identity beyond any doubt. At the minimum this entailed revealing the

³⁸A.D.I. (K) Report No. 328, Frame Nos. 9-10. This report asserts that until about the spring of 1944 the majority of "Red Cross" forms were completed, at least in greater part, but that after D-Day fewer and fewer of the forms were filled out. Ibid., Frame No. 10.

captive's flying unit. The prisoner was then left in his cell to contemplate the interrogator's last words about the Gestapo.

The cell was small, measuring ten and one-half feet in length, five and one-half feet in width, and eight feet in height.³⁹ The airman was left alone with his thoughts without anything to divert his attention. The furnishings consisted of only a bed, one stool, and two blankets. No reading or writing materials were available. One light fixture was turned on and off at random from somewhere outside the cell. The same outside control was exercised over the electric room heaters. This item was the source of much suffering for the prisoners. The temperature in the room became almost unbearable, rising so high at times as to singe a towel laid on the radiator and making the bed and all metal hot enough to scorch the bare hand. The walls of the cells were especially constructed to retain heat and the one window in the room was closed and painted over.⁴⁰ The Germans insisted that the walls were constructed in this fashion to prevent communication between the prisoners and that the heat rose to such high temperatures on occasion because of breakdowns in the heating system. These explanations were considered inadequate both during and after the war.⁴¹ In the meantime, the effect on the prisoners was predictable.

³⁹A.D.I. (K) Report No. 328, Frame No. 0472. Some sources list the dimensions as being ten feet in length and four feet in width. "Dulag Luft," 23.

⁴⁰Bern to Secretary of State, August 17, 1943, File No. 711.62114A/45, Record Group 59; A.D.I. (K) Report No. 328, Frame Nos. 0472 and 0478.

⁴¹Bern to Secretary of State, August 17, 1943, File No. 711.62114A/45, Record Group 59; A.D.I. (K) Report No. 328, Frame No. 0472. At the Nuremberg trials, it was brought out by Major Cline, a mechanical engineer from Cambridge who inspected the cells, that the

When the time came for them to be taken from their cells for interrogation, they were relieved and thankful just to be momentarily out of confinement. This feeling of gratitude was an important element during the next interrogation session.

The individual who interrogated the prisoner during the first session had by this time turned over all his data to another interrogator, one who was carefully chosen to deal with the particular captive at hand. The man who now conducted the interrogation was a specialist who handled only crewmen from bombers, or fighters, or whatever his area of expertise might be. All of the interrogators spoke excellent, oftentimes flawless, English and had lived for extended periods of time in Allied countries. Most of them were good judges of character, and they had a large array of techniques to employ against the captives during the interrogation sessions.

Taking advantage of the prisoner's sense of relief over being let out of his cell, the interrogator usually began the session by adopting a friendly approach. He offered the prisoner cigarettes or chocolate and began a light conversation concerning such topics as the unfortunate effects of war upon those caught up in it, sports, music or art, or some aspect of life in the captive's native country, or the mutual problems of military men. The conversation was calculated to make the prisoner feel safe and relaxed.

It was very difficult for the prisoner to stick to the name, rank, and serial number replies under these circumstances. Analysts

one and one-half kilowatt heaters installed in the cells were far in excess of the requirements, and that a five hundred watt heater would have been sufficient to produce a comfortable sixty-five degrees Fahrenheit temperature. As it was, temperatures rose to as high as 129 degrees. "Dulag Luft," 16.

agree that it was particularly difficult for officers to remain silent, the majority feeling that their breeding and background required them to parry with the interrogator on such obviously innocent matters. Unfortunately, every word they spoke to relieve their sense of being ill at ease gave the interrogator "a handle to grab on to."⁴²

If the prisoner was able to withhold the desired information throughout extended friendly conversations, the next tactic usually involved threats of violence. The primary threat was that the captive would be turned over to the Gestapo. This threat was most effectively employed when the prisoner refused to identify his unit. The interrogator repeatedly insisted that this information was needed to prove the subject's claim that he was an aviator. He reminded the prisoner that, until such proof was given, no word would be sent out regarding his capture. This caused considerable anxiety among the men since they knew their loved ones back home had received word that they were missing in action, but not that they were alive and well in a German prison camp. Furthermore, they knew that until the Red Cross received information on their captivity, the Germans could kill them or keep them hidden away for years, all the while claiming they had never been captured. Jews were told they might be subjected to persecution. And whenever the Germans learned that a prisoner had relatives in

⁴²A.D.I. (K) Report No. 328, Frame No. 0475. Not unexpectedly, other ranks suffered less from feelings of delicacy about being adamant. As was noted, "In general they felt no compunction about being stubborn to the point of downright rudeness: they were less easily flattered than officers, and they had fewer delusions about the real purpose of the interrogator's conversation. The average sergeant felt instinctively that he was not sufficiently important to warrant as much attention out of pure chivalry, and to this extent officers as a class were easier to interrogate than other ranks." Ibid. Ingenhutt reached these same conclusions.

German-held territory, suggestions were made to the airman of what might happen to relatives if he did not talk. All of these factors created great uncertainty in the minds of the prisoners.

The evidence suggests that such threats were carried out only in very rare cases. Nor was physical violence relied upon with the possible exception of an occasional slap on the face. The interrogators prided themselves on being able to get the information they wanted without resorting to such vulgar tactics. And the results they achieved would seem to bear out their claim. A man captured in civilian clothes did not need to be tortured. He only needed to be reminded of how the Gestapo treated spies. As one interrogation report noted: "under mental pressure because of his civilian-looking flying clothes, the [prisoner] told all."⁴³ And among such groups as the eleven-man B-17 crews, it would not be unusual for at least one of the men to reveal the identity of his squadron. And if the crew had stepped forward as they were asked to do at the reception center, the Germans gained an important piece of information they wanted on all eleven men as a result of one brief security violation.

Although physical violence was considered unnecessary, other forms of physical persuasion were used. The diet given the prisoners was woefully inadequate and had the cumulative effect of weakening the prisoners' resistance in the face of repeated interrogation sessions. And as already mentioned, after a time the heat and other irritations the prisoners were subjected to in solitary confinement often made the

⁴³A.D.I. (K) Report No. 328, Frame No. 0477. The civilian clothes were usually obtained from the underground, and fear of giving away the identity of the party who gave them the clothes placed additional mental and emotional strain on the prisoner.

men anxious to leave their cells even though this meant submitting to more interrogation. The solitude created a need for conversation of any kind, and the interrogators were only too happy to oblige the victim.

One means the Germans used to capitalize upon the prisoner's awareness of his physical discomfort was bribery. The forms of bribery practiced at Dulag Luft were subtle but effective. The offer of a cigarette, a drink, a parole walk or trip to the camp cinema, a promise to expedite notification of the prisoner's safety to his next-of-kin, or a pledge that members of a crew would be allowed to remain together—all these things could be employed without the airman realizing that he was accepting a bribe. The Germans knew better than to ask for something directly in return. They were satisfied that if the prisoner accepted the favor, he would likely feel a little indebted to them, or at least be inclined to view them in a more friendly and trusting way than before, an asset the interrogator would turn to his own use at a later time.

One form of bribery was concealed under the guise of chivalry. High-ranking captives were often given preferential treatment at Hohemark Hospital and at a hunting lodge outside Frankfurt. At times they were invited to the officers' mess where they were wined and dined, all the while being subjected to discreet efforts to obtain information from them. More frequently, however, they were simply used for display at these places, the intention being to portray to newcomers a contented group of senior officers enjoying the "comradeship of the Knights of the Air" of which the Germans so frequently

boasted.⁴⁴

There was yet one more technique the interrogator could use in his efforts to obtain information from the prisoner seated before him, that of totally disarming him by convincing him that he need no longer maintain silence since the Germans already knew everything they wanted to know. Much to the dismay of the airman, the interrogators seemed to be able to support their claim. This technique consisted of shocking and demoralizing the victim by citing for him his unit number, the location of the unit, the name of its commander or other notable personnel, the types of aircraft it possessed, the missions it had been on, possibly some of the missions planned for it, and a seemingly infinite list of other details that left the prisoner astonished and convinced that the Germans did in fact know everything they wanted to know. A true account of the experiences of one prisoner will demonstrate the type of details they often had at their disposal and the effect their disclosure had upon the airmen.

Delmar T. Spivey was an Army Air Force colonel shot down in August 1944, and concerning the detailed information his interrogator produced he recalls:

To prove his point he produced a group picture of the flying personnel of a group of the Eighth Air Force, the group commander, his staff and all. He told me about the group I was flying with and the names of members of my crew, that I had a wife and a child whose birthday would come two days later, where I had been throughout my service, and wound up his dissertation by saying that I should have had my big feet on my desk at Maxwell Field, Alabama, instead of trying to find out why so many of our bombers were being shot down over Germany.

⁴⁴A.D.I. (K) Report No. 328, Frame No. 0478; Eric Friedheim, "Welcome to Dulag Luft," Air Force, 28 (September 1945), 73.

This information shocked me because I was in Europe on secret orders and I know positively that not a person on the crew knew me, my job or mission much less my wife's name and my child's birthday. I filled out the Red Cross form, leaving out the data concerning my group—he filled it in for me. As a parting shot he told me that I was lucky because the previously scheduled mission on the ballbearing works at Schweinfurt had been scrubbed twice and that when it was carried out the Luftwaffe was waiting for us. What he told me was true, so the next day my heart nearly failed me when I heard all the antiaircraft and saw our bombers being viciously attacked by German fighters . . . This was the first shuttle raid from England to North Africa and I had been briefed on it and was on one of the airplanes ready to take off when the mission was scrubbed.⁴⁵

How did the Germans acquire this type of information? Did it come from spies in Allied squadrons or from stool pigeons housed with the prisoners, from microphones in the walls, or from airmen who talked too much? The answer is that it came from a wide range of sources with the most obvious choices listed above being among the least important.

One estimate is that about eighty per cent of the information the Germans obtained was produced through the work of a branch of the Evaluation Center referred to as the Document Section.⁴⁶ The Document Section was the most efficient and productive division in the center. It obtained information from Allied newspapers, books, periodicals, the pockets of captured personnel, and from airplanes that

⁴⁵Spivey, "History," 26-27.

⁴⁶This estimate was given in a staff report drawn up for the Counter Intelligence Corps, U.S. Strategic Air Forces in Europe and made public in Friedheim, "Welcome to Dulag Luft," 17. See also A.D.I. (K) Report No. 328, Frame No. 0485.

came down in enemy territory. No item was too small or insignificant for it to notice. Every scrap of material was scrutinized with extreme care.

The results were startling. A one-way railroad ticket between two English villages gave the Germans an important lead about the impending transfer of airmen attached to a British Wellington bomber group from one part of England to another. On the basis of this information the Luftwaffe subsequently learned that the RAF was shifting a number of these planes to antisubmarine patrol duty. The document experts became so resourceful and methodical that they could identify a flier's unit by the manner in which his ration card was marked. At a certain base, for instance, the post exchange clerk always used a heavy black pencil when marking the cards, and since the PX counter was constructed of rough board all the cards from that group carried the impression of its distinctive grain pattern in the pencil marking. Aircrews were briefed against transporting papers and other extraneous documents, but they persisted in carrying them for a variety of reasons. The most serious violations involved diaries. One diary revealed the number of crews undergoing training in the United States as well as how many heavy bombers were available for this purpose. It also divulged highly secret data about the very heavy bombardment program. Another source of identifying members of flying units was the photograph that had been furnished airmen to facilitate their escape through the underground. Photographs from the 91st Bomb Group had a particular brown color. Everyone from the 95th Bomb Group wore the

same checkered civilian coat when he had his picture taken.⁴⁷

Numerous other sections were at work at the evaluation center, and they all added pieces to the puzzle. A Yellow File Section busied itself with collecting biographical information on Allied personnel. They utilized newspapers, awards lists, magazines, radio broadcast information, and censored mail, and carefully catalogued the collected data for quick reference. A Squadron History Section gathered data on every Allied squadron and its historical development. Facts on its past and present location, its postal addresses, names of its leading personalities, and the special equipment which it was known to operate were shown in great detail. An Attack Department prepared a map each day displaying the Allied air operations of the preceding twenty-four hours. It was made chiefly on the basis of German radar plots and Observer Corps reports, and showed targets, courses, results of missions, and numbers of aircraft involved. Any information obtained from interrogations in progress was incorporated into the display so that each interrogator had access to the work of his fellow interrogators. Even cancelled operations were recorded, and, in general, interrogators received excellent background information from this section. Two Situation Rooms also contributed to the interrogator's arsenal of knowledge. One attended to RAF activities and the other to USAAC actions. Maps showed the locations of recent raids, the progress of raids still taking place, and the front lines of the opposing armies. They even gave the fullest possible details of ferry flights and transport movements. A staff of translators in

⁴⁷Friedheim, "Welcome to Dulag Luft," 17, 73; A.D.I. (K) Report No. 328, Frame No. 0464.

the Press Evaluation Section went through all copies of Allied newspapers and magazines looking for pertinent information. A Photograph Section developed and printed all films found on a prisoner, as well as any that were recovered from the gun cameras of downed aircraft. A Technical Section maintained a library and museum of Allied equipment. A Crash File was compiled which contained information on each known crash site in Germany or German occupied territory. Each crash received a number, and a record was kept of the type of aircraft, location of crash, and such details about the personnel on board and home unit as emerged in later interrogations. And finally, a group of people sat in a radio listening post around the clock seven days a week listening to the wireless communications of the airmen—plane to plane, plane to base, and base to plane. The conversations were recorded and transcribed and the radio frequencies noted along with their place of origin.⁴⁸

How was all of this information put together and utilized to ensnare the unsuspecting prisoner? Some revealing insights are given by Hanns Joachim Scharff, the interrogator referred to earlier. After explaining the sources of information available to him, he cites the types of data he relied upon in the various interrogation sessions. Using a fictitious fighter pilot as an example of a typical subject, he notes how he first learned of the pilot's unit number through the use of the escape aid photograph as outlined above. With the squadron number at hand, he next scrutinized the squadron's historical file to acquire a thorough knowledge of assigned personnel and personal

⁴⁸A.D.I. (K) Report No. 328, Frame Nos. 0463-0466; Scharff, "Without Torture," 90. Other Sections that were employed at Auswertestelle West, such as the Political Section, are described in the same document.

anecdotes about squadron activities obtained from earlier interrogations of prisoners from that particular squadron. He also studied photographs of the home base airdrome, its hangars and runways, the shops and the barracks.

Armed with this information, Scharff confronted the prisoner. The object of the interrogation was not to learn any great secrets about grand strategy or similar matters. It was commonly understood by the interrogators that the average airman was not privy to such information. Rather, the interrogator sought tactical and operational information that would help the antiaircraft gunners place their guns in suitable locations, assist in the evaluation of the latest technical equipment used on the missions, determine target priorities, and gather small talk that would assist them in breaking down the resistance of future prisoners.

A typical question which the interrogator might wish answered, Scharff stated, would be, "What is the significance of the shooting of ten white tracer bullets in quick succession during air combat?" To obtain the answer, he would refrain from making any reference to the subject during the formal interrogation session. Rather, he would use the session to convince the pilot that he knew everything about him and his squadron. At the same time, he would work on the pilot's ego and confidence by openly stating that, as an experienced interrogator, he knew when he had met his match, that he fully recognized that he was going to get no confirmation of this information from this pilot, and that he was, therefore, ready to recommend his transfer to a permanent camp.

Relieved over this news, the pilot would be susceptible to the suggestion that the two of them now forget momentarily that they were

enemies and take a friendly stroll outside the gates. During the walk the conversation would touch upon numerous topics. Adding to the image of knowing everything of importance, the interrogator would confidently shift the conversation to the problems the English were having with logistics, and would suggest that the United States was having its problems too. He would assert that it was too bad industry in the pilot's homeland had run out of chemicals for red-tracer bullets and would add that the white tracers must be hard to follow with the eye in a dog fight, justifying the use of so many of them in a string. Without thinking, the knowledgeable pilot would give in to the irresistible impulse to set the interrogator straight on this error and reply, "You're nuts. They haven't run out of anything back home. We use those white tracers so that other guys in the formation can see what target each pilot is committed to, so they won't all be wasting bullets on the same Kraut plane." Having obtained the desired information, the interrogator would change the conversation to some triviality so quickly that the pilot would not even realize that he had given away an important piece of information. In this and succeeding talks, additional data would be gathered and numerous anecdotes about life in the pilot's old squadron picked up for inclusion in the Squadron History file for use in future interrogations.

Scharff emphasized that, in reference to the men he interrogated, no American pilot talked through fear or through any ignoble hope of bettering his condition as a prisoner. He estimated, however, that all but about twenty out of the more than five hundred men he interviewed did talk and tell him exactly the things he was trying to find out.

There were instances of prisoners who knowingly revealed military secrets. One prisoner provided the Germans with a page and a half of technical details about the P-47's combat flying range, the use of its supercharger, the armament it carried, and the tactics its pilots employed. One bomber crewman revealed that the form of attack that was most feared by them was that which came from in front and twelve hundred feet higher than his own plane because only the top turret could then come into action. And the German interrogation reports reveal other cases where airmen freely divulged information on equipment, the types of formations flown against various targets, and the meanings of important code words, to mention just a few items of interest to the Germans.⁴⁹

In view of its reputation for success, it is indeed ironic that it was Dulag Luft that let slip an opportunity to discover the biggest intelligence plum of the war, the news that the Allies had broken the German code. This was the "ultra secret" of the war and it so happened that a general officer who passed through Luftwaffe channels as a prisoner of war, Brigadier General Arthur W. Vanaman, had been briefed on the existence of "ultra" just a short time before he was shot down and captured.⁵⁰

⁴⁹"Dulag Luft Prisoners Tell Almost All," Hq. 1st Ftr. Command, Mitchell Field, N.Y., 27 Sept. 44, M-16824, Summary #261, cited in Edwin A. Bland, Jr., "German Methods for Interrogation of Captured Allied Aircrews" (thesis, Air Command and Staff School of Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, March 1948), 13-15.

⁵⁰Personal conversation with the author. General Vanaman was the highest ranking American officer in captivity and later became the Senior Officer at Stalag Luft III.

Knowing what happened to the prisoners at Dulag Luft is important because it helps us recognize and appreciate the common, but very upsetting, experience the airmen encountered en route to Stalag Luft III. Most of them did not leave Dulag Luft burdened with a sense of guilt, for they sincerely believed they had not given any important information to the Germans. They did, however, leave with a heightened respect for German thoroughness, organization, and intelligence gathering ability.

The prisoners were usually retained at the interrogation center for about one or two weeks (but sometimes as long as a month or more). After that, they were sent to one of the transit camps mentioned above where they remained for several more days. From there they were sent to a permanent camp usually in groups of fifty to one hundred men, such groups generally being referred to as "purges."

The Journey to Stalag Luft III

The trip from Dulag Luft to Sagan was also quite an ordeal. It was made by train, usually in the famous cars taken from the French marked "40 hommes"—"8 Chevaux" (40 men - 8 horses). Since the cars had often been used to haul livestock it was not unusual to find fresh manure or an inch of black dirt on the floor. Sometimes the Germans would choose several prisoners to clean out the cars before the others were loaded on board. On other occasions the men had to mangle in the debris throughout the trip. A few boards were placed in the car for the prisoners to sit or lie down on, depending on the arrangements that could be made in light of the number of people in the car. Since the cars were almost always filled beyond capacity, the majority of the men had to remain standing or sit on the filthy

floor.

The prisoners suffered from other discomforts on the trip. Although there was usually enough food available, the men had to go without drinking water for periods of twenty-four hours or longer. There were no toilet facilities on board, and the travelers were unable to relieve themselves except perhaps in a nearby woods or a marshalling yard during a train stop. Little effort was made to provide any privacy for the prisoners, and the presence of women in the vicinity often caused the men to lose their one chance to answer nature's call.⁵¹

The cars were poorly ventilated and the atmosphere inside became oppressive as the train proceeded on its jerky way. The prison cars were assigned a low priority and were shuffled onto the end of one freight train after another, and shifted on and off railroad sidings. Thus the approximately three-hundred-mile trip took two days or longer, during which time the danger of being bombed or strafed by Allied aircraft was constant.

When the train finally pulled into the station at Sagan, the tired and dirty travelers got out and commenced the short walk from the station to the nearby camp. While at the transit camp, many had heard detailed accounts of the country club atmosphere at Stalag Luft III, which reportedly contained swimming pools and golf courses. Few prisoners entertained any delusions about what lie ahead and they certainly did not believe the country club stories, but they did look forward with a sense of anticipation to seeing their new home so that they could size it up for themselves. They also welcomed the

⁵¹Spivey, "History," 34-35.

thought of being able to establish some kind of routine in their lives after the hectic uncertainty of recent days. And they knew that there would be old friends there, many of whom they had thought were dead but whose names they had seen on the register at the transit camp. With a swirl of such thoughts running through their minds, the prisoners stepped beyond the edge of the forest that separated the railway station from the camp and gazed upon the maze of barbed wire and gray buildings that comprised Stalag Luft III.

CHAPTER V

BEFORE THE GATES OPENED

Introduction

Allied prisoners occupied Stalag Luft III from April 1942 until February 1945, a period of almost three years. During this time the camp grew rapidly from a small enclosure containing two compounds, a service area, and a section for the German staff as of April 1942 to a sprawling complex containing six compounds two years later. The prison population mushroomed from several hundred men when the camp opened to over 10,000 men when it closed. British and Dominion troops were in the majority in the beginning, but the Americans were in greater numbers at the end. Relations with the German staff went from good to bad and in between, influenced by the pace of the war, the conduct of the prisoners, outside interference, and personnel changes. And the prisoners themselves altered their way of life from time to time in accordance with the availability of supplies and the tasks they set for themselves.

The phenomenal growth of the camp and the frequency of physical changes largely explain the difficulty in rendering an exact account of the conditions and events associated with Stalag Luft III; strictly speaking, everything should be viewed in reference to time and place. Doing so, however, obscures sight of the real essence of the camp's history, which is found in the continuous rather than the broken lines

of development. The opening of new compounds and the shifting of populations within the camp interrupted the scheme of things, but only momentarily. For when these events occurred, only a brief time elapsed before the prisoners created, or perhaps it would be more correct to say recreated, a form of existence much like that found in the older compounds, complete with a sense of community spirit and a full spectrum of activities.

This continuity was possible primarily because each compound contained approximately the same facilities and because they were occupied by a relatively homogenous group of people who possessed a sense of purpose and group identity. This sense emanated from several sources, two of these being the prisoners' common national heritages and roles as comrades in arms. But these things in themselves do not account for the community spirit that existed in the compounds of Stalag Luft III. Talent, leadership, and experience all played a role in the development of the prisoner communities.

The matter of experience is an important one here, for from the beginning Stalag Luft III housed prisoners who were by then all too familiar with life in captivity. By the time the camp's gates were opened for the first time in April 1942, some of the men who passed through them had been behind barbed wire for two and one-half years, a period of time which might well be referred to as the "formative years." It was during these thirty months that the initial leaders emerged and asserted themselves. It was also during this time that both the Germans and the prisoners formed opinions about one another in their respective roles as captors and captives, devised various concepts and techniques to assist each party in

achieving its own ends, and established policies that had an impact on events in the years to come. All these things which took place during the formative years profoundly affected conditions and the course of events later at Stalag Luft III.

The Heritage from Dulag Luft

Members of the British Air Force became prisoners of the Third Reich as early as September 1939 and continued to arrive in small numbers throughout the fall months. Among the first were Tommy Thompson and "Wank" Murray, two fliers shot down while flying over Berlin with a load of leaflets. Much to their surprise, they were taken to see Goering himself, who in typical fashion received them cordially and complained that they had disturbed his sleep and had obliged him to take shelter. He assured them, however, that he had always appreciated the chivalrous way the Royal Flying Corps had fought in the last war and said he intended to see that Royal Air Force prisoners were treated correctly. They soon had reason to wonder what he meant by that remark, since they next found themselves locked in Spangenberg Castle, sleeping on straw mattresses and living on the lowest scale of German rations.¹

While at Spangenberg, the two fliers met the other members of this earliest group of downed airmen. Among them was one officer who outranked the others and who was twice the age of most of the others. His name was Harry Melville Arbuthnot Day, better known as Wing Commander Day, or simply Wings. On August 3, 1939, he had celebrated

¹Sydney Smith, Mission Escape (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1968), 15.

his forty-first birthday and on Friday, October 13, had met his fate while on a reconnaissance mission over the Ruhr in a Blenheim, an aircraft that was no match for the speed, armament, and climbing powers of the fighters possessed by the Germans.² If any one man could be identified as the directing force in the British process of adapting to prison life during the formative years, it would probably be Wings Day.³

An insight into the course British prisoners were to follow in the days ahead can be gained from the manner in which they conducted themselves in the beginning during Appell (the daily head count taken by the Germans). When the German officer in charge approached, Wings snapped his little squad to rigid attention, made a sharp heel-and-toe turn, and rendered an impressive Marine-style salute. The reason for his conduct, his biographer notes, was that Wings felt that if he ever needed to insist on the rights granted to prisoners by the Geneva Convention, he would be in a stronger position to do so if he had at least outwardly fulfilled his own obligations, one of these being the observance of military courtesies. Even more revealing is a statement Wings made on November 10, 1939, when the British and French prisoners in Spangenberg paused for a brief but meaningful

²Ibid., 1, 4-5, 7, 42.

³Smith's book, Mission Escape, was originally published in Great Britain in 1968 under the title Wings Day, and is an excellent biography of Wing Commander Day. Although Smith never goes so far as to state explicitly what the present author has just asserted about Commander Day's role as the directing force behind British prison camp policies and programs, one quickly gains this impression from his book, and from what can be gleaned from other sources, there is every reason to believe that Wings deserves the eminent position claimed for him here.

ceremony commemorating the end of the last war. Facing the small gathering before him, he declared:

Nineteen-eighteen may seem a long way off to some of you. At the beginning of that year it looked as though we had lost the war. It may seem to some of you now that you have already lost this one. But we beat the Germans in 1918 and what you have already done will help to beat them again. For you the war is not over. Vive la France—and England.⁴

In the second week of December 1939, Wings and some of the other Air Force prisoners were transferred to Oberursel where the interrogation and transit center, Dulag Luft, was just being opened. The Germans assigned him to the permanent staff that operated the transit portion of the camp, and he again found himself to be the Senior British Officer (SBO). It was therefore his task, among other things, to establish policies regarding various aspects of prison life. As a trained and experienced military man, he knew the official answers that should be given to the questions that might arise. In the days ahead, however, he encountered situations for which the official positions seemed inadequate or inappropriate. And when such matters came to his attention, he attempted to establish policies in accordance with the facts as he knew them, even if it meant violating the rules. Wings' performance in this regard proved to be very good, for the policies he set down during the formative years usually remained in effect throughout the remainder of the war. Only a few of his more important policy decisions are mentioned here.

One of the first decisions Wings made at Dulag Luft related to the question of signing a parole slip in return for the privilege of

⁴Smith, Mission Escape, 17-18.

taking walks outside the compound. Wings knew that, according to the official British view, parole was not to be given under any circumstances. He feared that if he accepted parole he would be liable to a court martial later on, but concluded that the indefinite restrictions of the tiny Dulag camp justified parole for reasons of mental health.⁵

Another question affecting the health and welfare of the prisoners arose in regard to the distribution of Red Cross food parcels. In the early days of the war the parcels were addressed to each individual by name. Since the German diet was inadequate from the beginning, only those officers who had been in captivity long enough to allow time for their names to be entered into the addressing system could expect to receive sufficient food. To offset this inequity, Wings ordered that the food in the Red Cross parcels be pooled. The old prisoners thereby gave up their favored position in order that new arrivals would receive better rations, an important factor in their recovery from the recent trauma of having been shot down and interrogated. This policy was later observed at Stalag Luft III even after the compounds were divided by nationality.

His policy relating to the use of coded messages to relay intelligence information home provides evidence that already this early in the war the prisoners meant it when they asserted that for them the war was not over. One day during the spring of 1940 an airman passed through the camp and told Wings that he had been taught a special code which the prisoners could use to send and receive messages

⁵Ibid., 24.

to and from London. Wings had never heard of the system before, but he immediately realized its importance and asked that he and several other officers on the permanent staff be registered as code operators. In time valuable information reached London in coded form by means of the prisoners' letters home. After the Germans finished interrogating each new prisoner, they sent him to the transit camp where Wings and his staff queried them about the tactics used by the fighters that had brought them down and the methods used by the interrogators who questioned them after their arrival at Dulag Luft. This data was then transmitted to England and helped the Royal Air Force devise effective countermeasures.⁶ This amounted to an open and shut case of espionage. The Germans would have been fully justified in putting anyone caught engaging in coding activities on trial as a spy.⁷

These policies and measures were indicative of the strong British conviction that the enemy's efforts must be frustrated, resisted, or circumvented in every possible way, and to them the British logically added escape activities. It was considered to be the duty of every British officer to attempt to escape. But not

⁶Ibid., 30.

⁷William E. S. Flory, Prisoners of War: A Study in the Development of International Law, with an Introduction by Norman H. Davis (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 1942), 37. Flory states that "It is recognized in customary international law that persons otherwise entitled to the status of prisoners of war may forfeit the right to such status by the commission of certain acts such as espionage, violation of parole, and war crimes. The quality of a military spy is dependent upon four conditions: 1) he must either be in search of or have obtained information; 2) he must intend to put the information in the hands of the enemy; 3) his mission must carry him into the zone of operations; and 4) he must be acting clandestinely or on false pretenses. For further information on this question see Morris Greenspan, The Modern Law of Land Warfare (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 326-32.

everyone possessed the temperament or the talent for such a difficult task. Furthermore, it was a duty for which virtually no person had been trained. Interestingly enough, the Germans were almost as much in the dark when it came to preventing escape as the prisoners were in executing it. Consequently, the opposing sides developed their skills through prolonged trial and error. Wings was joined in this task by a highly talented group of individuals. Lieutenant Commander Jimmy Buckley, who served as the major organizer of escape efforts until he disappeared at sea in an escape attempt in 1943, was a Dartmouth graduate who exhibited a remarkable aptitude for sorting out complicated problems. Squadron Leader Roger Bushell, the man who later masterminded the mass escape at Stalag Luft III in March 1944, was a South African-born lawyer, a graduate of both English and French universities, and a former British ski champion and rugger player. He had an eye for detail and spoke fluent French and German with a Swiss accent. Flying Officer John Gilles also spoke German fluently and was a chartered accountant with a tidy mind. Flight Lieutenant Harvey Vivian, a graduate of American, English, and German universities, spoke German like a native. And finally, there was Major Johnnie Dodge, an American-born nephew by marriage of Winston Churchill, who turned out to be an avid escaper.⁸

By June 1941 this select group had collected a quantity of

⁸Three sources which contain further information on these men and from which the above data was extracted, are Smith, Mission Escape, 36ff, Paul Brickhill, The Great Escape, with an Introduction by George Harsh, A Fawcett Crest Book (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1950), passim; and Aidan Crawley, Escape from Germany: A History of R.A.F. Escapes During the War (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), 27-31. Hereinafter cited as Escape.

German money, used their parole walks to gather information on the paths and roads in the surrounding countryside, obtained train schedules, and completed a tunnel out of the camp. Including an individual escape by Roger Bushell from a goat shed near the exercise field, a total of eighteen men, including Wings, made their way out of camp in early June and caused a furor in the Reich command structure. It was the first successful mass escape⁹ of British prisoners, and Himmler did not miss the opportunity to point out to Hitler that the Luftwaffe was obviously incapable of doing its part in protecting the security of the Reich.¹⁰ Each of the eighteen men who escaped from the tunnel at Dulag Luft was recaptured and transferred elsewhere.

The Contributions from Barth

Following their recapture, most of the escapers from Dulag Luft ended up in Stalag Luft I, a permanent Luftwaffe camp located at Barth in the province of Pomerania on the shore of the Baltic. It had been opened in the summer of 1940 and exhibited a mixture of good and bad qualities. The facilities were adequate and at times relations with the German administrators were cordial.¹¹ For the most part, however, the camp was characterized by turmoil and unrest. During the eight months from the fall of France until March 1941,

⁹A mass escape was considered to be anything involving five or more prisoners.

¹⁰Smith, Mission Escape, 48-50, 55.

¹¹Gustav Simoleit, "Prisoner of War Camps of the Air Force in World War II," Part I, May 5, 1969, unpublished manuscript enclosed in Simoleit to Spivey, May 5, 1969, n.p., Simoleit Folder, Spivey Collection [Special Collections Room, USAF Academy Library, Colorado], hereinafter cited as "Prisoner of War Camps."

no Red Cross food parcels had arrived, and the inadequate German rations had created a general feeling of want and mistrust among the prisoners. They became suspicious of one another and suspected that some of their numbers were collaborating with the Germans, especially when tunnel after tunnel was discovered and destroyed. By the summer of 1941 relations between the Germans and the prisoners were also very tense. Parole walks had been discontinued after two prisoners escaped on a walk for which they managed to avoid signing the parole forms. In addition, the prisoners had fused a microphone system the Germans had installed for the purpose of listening in on the prisoners' conversations, and a series of reprisals followed.

Again Wings Day found himself to be the Senior British Officer. He quickly realized that some corrective action had to be taken to eliminate the unrest. Based upon his own tunneling experience at Dulag Luft, he concluded that the Germans had been able to discover the prisoners' work so regularly because of the inadequate security measures the prisoners practiced among themselves. The Germans learned a great deal about the location and progress of the tunnels through the use of a microphone system they had placed in the ground along the perimeter fence. But they also benefited from the factionalism in camp. There was a lack of coordination among the would-be escapers and much effort was wasted because of feuds and jealousies. Wings concluded that all their attempts at escape were doomed to failure unless they tightened security and coordinated their efforts.

How could this be done? The answer did not lie in increased discipline, for here the commanding officer could not impose the King's Regulations. Furthermore, he concluded that the men did not

need to be directed as much as they needed the benefits of experienced leadership. No one of his age or level of experience had been in camp before. This was a case where his mere presence would help. He did what he could to settle the unrest among the men by forming boards of inquiry to investigate the charges of corruption and collaboration with the Germans the prisoners had lodged against one another and handled the findings in such a way that the gnawing doubts of the prisoners were largely dispelled. Then he did something which, perhaps more than anything else, served to develop camp spirit from that point on: he designated "escaping" as the "operational function" of the camp.¹² This kind of terminology was understood by virtually everyone. Every prisoner was a soldier and knew that the use of the word "operational" meant that as a unit they were back in the war. Many of them had felt guilty all along about the fact that they had been shot down, thinking that if they had banked their aircraft a little harder, dived a little farther, or climbed a little faster during that last flight, they might still be serving their country as operational members of their squadrons.¹³ Now they had a chance to contribute once again to the war effort, both as individuals and as an operational team. Individually, they could accomplish little, but together there was a chance they might create considerable havoc within the Reich. Now a person who never thought of escaping could feel that he was contributing something merely by the fact that he was helping others to

¹²Smith, Mission Escape, 58-60, 65-76.

¹³Interview with Albert P. Clark, April 7, 1973; James L. Cole, Jr., "Dulag Luft Recalled and Revisited," Aerospace Historian, 19 (June 1972), 64.

escape.

This was precisely the kind of feeling that the prisoners needed to pull them together. Wings himself calculated that no more than twenty-five per cent of the prisoners cared to venture escape at all, and that of those only five per cent could be considered dedicated escapers, fanatics who thought, dreamed, and talked of nothing else and availed themselves of every opportunity to get away no matter how appalling the risks. The others did not shy away from escape out of fear or laziness as much as from the simple conviction that they would not get very far. However, if asked to do so, they would work for the benefit of others who did wish to run the risks and make the effort. Wings felt that at least fifty per cent of the prisoners would help, and as things turned out his estimate was correct and perhaps even a little conservative.¹⁴

The objective of the prisoners' escape activities, then, was two-fold: to help individuals who wanted to escape, and to give the prisoners a feeling of doing something positive toward bringing the war to an end. Everyone knew that the escape attempts forced the Germans to abandon any ideas about economizing on the guarding of Luftwaffe prisoners. Most of them had long since tired of being told that for them the war was over; escaping was one more way of telling the Germans that such rhetoric was only wishful thinking on the latter's part. Only five per cent of the population may have been

¹⁴Smith, Mission Escape, 65-66. One authoritative source indicates that between sixty and seventy per cent of the prisoners at Stalag Luft III worked in one capacity or another on the escape activities. Interview with Albert P. Clark, November 8, 1975.

avid escapers, but they were a highly active five per cent. Besides, there were many others who periodically caught the fever.

Wings soon realized that there was no lack of interest in escape at Barth. Wings' impression, his biographer notes, was that he was "shut in a kennel with a good pack of foxhounds. They were over, round and on top, bursting with energy, sniffing at every nook and cranny. Eyes bright and sterns up and waving, all looking to be let out."¹⁵ All that they needed was to be organized. Wings invited Jimmy Buckley and one Barth old-timer into his room, where they spent about a week interviewing everyone who had anything to do with escapes or had anything to say about escaping. Wings again appointed Buckley as head of the Escape Committee, and he, in turn, selected two other officers to help him. In addition, each barracks elected its own escape committee of three.¹⁶

The prisoners started forty-eight tunnels at Barth before the Germans marched them to Stalag Luft III in April 1942. Unfortunately, the camp at Barth sat right on the seashore, and the water level was only about four or five feet below the surface. Consequently, the Germans succeeded in destroying most of them by driving heavy wagons around the compounds. At least one tunnel proved worthwhile, however. Flight Lieutenants "Death" Shore and Jimmy James dug what was known as a "blitz" or lightening tunnel out of one of the brick incinerators, and though James was caught immediately, Shore made a "home run" all the way to England.¹⁷

¹⁵Smith, Mission Escape, 66.

¹⁶Ibid., 3.

¹⁷Brickhill, The Great Escape, 19; Smith, Mission Escape, 73.

Other methods of escape also proved successful. Flying Officer Leason tried to march out of camp dressed as a German interpreter who was escorting two prisoners to see the German dentist in the town of Barth. Unfortunately, there was a flaw in his fake gate pass and he was caught, but he later walked out disguised as a German chimney sweep while the real sweep was still in camp.¹⁸

On another occasion, two prisoners decked themselves out in homemade German uniforms, jackboots of black polished cardboard, and dummy wooden rifles and joined a night platoon of guards closing the wooden window shutters on the outsides of the barracks. They succeeded in passing through the gate with the guards, but then something unexpected happened. The guards were not supposed to talk to one another. When one of them violated the rules and asked one of the prisoners a question, the reply was unsuited to the question, and the German guard got suspicious and soon uncovered the prisoners' disguise. At this point, one account relates:

. . . all the guards, including the second prisoner stopped marching and stood around in a group, roaring with laughter and slapping one another on the back. The second prisoner joined in the fun and fortunately found it unnecessary to say anything, as in his case also this would have been fatal.

Just as the party was about to resume its march to take the first prisoner to the guardhouse, a German Officer appeared to whom the whole story had to be recounted. The officer enjoyed the joke with the rest and ordered them to march on; whereupon, solely because of the presence of the officer, a check of

¹⁸ A fairly complete account of Leason's chimney sweep escape is given in Crawley, Escape, 65-66. Also see Smith, Mission Escape, 74. Smith states that Wings last saw the real sweep after he was stopped at the gate and on his way to being consigned to the cooler.

the number was made and it was found that there was still one too many. Chaos ensued and every German started feverishly accusing his neighbor of being an imposter until finally the second prisoner was unmasked.¹⁹

There were even instances in which officers attempted to escape during blizzards, hoping to use the swirling snow for cover while they climbed over the fence. One man in January 1942, and then two men in March, got beyond the wire, but all were recaptured soon thereafter.²⁰

The escape organization helped people get out of the camp, and it also aided people who wanted to "escape" within the camp by using a technique which became known as the "ghost" system. First used when Shore made his escape from the incinerator, the ghost system aimed at never allowing the Germans to be absolutely certain of the total camp strength or the total number missing in a particular escape. When an escape took place one or more ghosts immediately went into hiding. When the Germans made the next count of the prisoners the ghosts would be among the missing, supposedly having escaped. This meant that there were now extra men in camp who could escape at the next opportunity without raising an alarm, an important factor during those first few hours after a break when the escaper needed to get as far away from the camp as possible before the search began. If the Germans learned of but had not identified the ghost escaper another ghost would go into hiding at once, and the Germans would put out the description of the wrong prisoner. The first ghost remained hidden

¹⁹Crawley, Escape, 72-73.

²⁰Ibid., 55-56.

for three weeks before being discovered in the roof of one of the barracks during a routine search. A second effort stretched out six weeks, until the ghost dressed himself up like one of the Germans who worked inside the compound and walked out the main gate. Much to his dismay, however, he soon ran face to face into the man he was impersonating and took his customary turn in the cooler. Only a dedicated escaper would be likely to volunteer for a stint as a ghost, for the role entailed hard work and considerable mental and physical strain. It meant hiding in cupboards, in tunnels under construction, under mattresses, and in other such places.

Another practice designed to frustrate the Germans' attempts to keep close tabs on the prisoners became known as the "Duty Pilot" system. Eventually a permanent institution in many Luftwaffe camps, the purpose of the system was to report the arrivals and departures of every German who entered and left the compound. The terminology connected with it reportedly stemmed from the assignment of pilots on RAF aerodromes to extra daily duty as Duty Pilots, their task being to monitor all air activities on the base, including weather forecasts, refueling, and other matters pertaining to airplanes and aircrews. At Barth the Duty Pilot sat at a window offering a good view of the front gate. He had in his possession a series of identity sketches of all the known German camp staff, with their names, a logbook showing times of entry and departure, and a staff of runners who would follow and report the Germans' progress throughout the camp back to the Duty Pilot and to the zones where various kinds of forbidden work was in progress. The Germans concluded that there was little they

could do about the practice and let it continue.²¹

In some instances the prisoners at Barth had begun to organize themselves as a community even before Wings arrived. A good example of this is the way they handled their financial affairs. Whenever the officers and enlisted men were held in close proximity to each other, the Germans had a ready-made situation for creating dissension between the two groups of prisoners. In accordance with the Geneva Convention, officers received regular pay while in prisoner status and those of other ranks did not.²² This meant that the officers could purchase useful items on the German market that were unavailable to the others. To help correct this inequity, the prisoners set up a fund with part of their pay to finance purchases by the NCOs of musical instruments, sports equipment, theatrical supplies, and other items. The Kommandant gave his approval of the plan and the funds were handled by two chartered accountants, Flight Lieutenants Stark and Gilles. The aid to the NCOs assumed two forms: direct grants to the senior NCO for general camp use, and loans to individuals for the purchase of cigarettes, food, and toilet articles. When Wings arrived, he discouraged the NCOs from contracting the personal loans and before long they were seldom used. In return, the grants to the

²¹Smith, Mission Escape, 78.

²²A full explanation of why this inequity existed, as well as more details on the financial matters discussed here, will be included in a later chapter discussing the entire spectrum of financial affairs among the prisoners.

senior NCO were increased.²³

Camp conditions as a whole seem to have been adequate at Barth from the time Wings arrived until the prisoners moved in April 1942. The prisoners were issued wallpaper which they put up in their sometimes crowded rooms. They had a large sports field and used it almost all day long playing football and other sports during warm weather and ice hockey in the winter. Games were available for indoor use, and a good library existed, stocked in part with privately owned books. Now and again performances and concerts were given in a big theater hall located in the NCOs' compound.²⁴

Wings took a dim view of one of the plays that was presented at Barth, although the German staff that attended the performance seemed to like it. Wings sat in the front row between the Kommandant and the German Camp Adjutant. The title of the play was Alice and Her Candle, and "the first four lines of the dialogue dispelled all hope of innocent fun," for "with every line it grew more vulgar and lewd." Cringing from embarrassment, Wings looked at the German faces, all registering concentration without a glimmer of a smile. He feared the Kommandant would arise in righteous indignation in protest of such a "lecherous and libidinous performance." Instead, after it was over, the Kommandant complimented Wings on "the fine standard of the Shaksperian English and the acting." Wings remained unimpressed and

²³"Financial Policy and Statement," June 1943, Index A-Short Summary of the Developments of the Financial Policy adopted in German Prison Camps, File No. 711.62114A/21 ["United States Prisoners of War Detained by Germany"], Record Group 59 [Diplomatic Branch, National Archives].

²⁴Report of visit by Dr. Folke Malmquist (title unknown), October 7, 1941, File No. 740.00114EW/1902 ["Prisoners of War-European War, 1939"], Record Group 59 [Diplomatic Branch, National Archives].

told the cast the next day that, although the Germans might have been struck with the cast's skillful "reversion to the robust humour of earlier centuries and . . . use of short descriptive Anglo-Saxon words," he himself was not, and recommended that they not do it again.²⁵

The prisoners obviously learned much at Stalag Luft I about community spirit and escape. So did the Germans. They learned a great deal about how to prevent escape and about how to handle a crafty bunch of prisoners. Some telling insights into their experiences at Barth appear in a brief made by Gustav Simoleit, a German officer who served on the camp staff at Barth.²⁶ It is interesting to compare his impressions with those of the prisoners.

Simoleit, a professor of history, geography, and ethnology in civilian life, served on the staff of an antiaircraft unit before reporting for duty at Barth in August 1940. He spoke English and several other languages and speculated that his linguistic skills were a primary factor in his selection for prisoner of war camp staff duties. He states that when he received his orders to report to Barth, he was extremely unhappy and apprehensive about the kind of men he would have to serve with in his new capacity as a jailer. He was greatly relieved to discover that his new position gave him "important duties and responsibilities," and that "the P.O.W. camp in Barth was one of the few places in the world where, during a merciless war, soldiers of both fighting armies could meet and establish personal

²⁵Smith, Mission Escape, 77.

²⁶Gustav Simoleit, "Prisoner of War Camps," n.p.

contacts . . ." and could become acquainted with "many reasonable and well educated people of other nations."

The living quarters in the Officers' Compound, Simoleit recalls, were divided into many small rooms, each occupied by only two, three or four officers. This system "enabled the prisoners to equip their rooms according to their own taste and fancy with furniture, pictures, book shelves, and flowers."

The Americans served as the Protecting Power for the British at the time, and Simoleit remembers their visits to the camp on inspection trips. When they arrived at the camp, the Kommandant and his staff cordially received them and invited them inside for breakfast or coffee. Both then and later in the day after the inspection had been completed, the Germans and Americans discussed the prisoners' complaints "in the highest degree of understanding and cooperation."

Unfortunately, Simoleit writes with a note of sadness, "this relatively satisfactory life and the good relations between the prisoners and the German personnel resulted in difficulties and troubles." It seems that the "Military and civilian authorities, especially the funktionaries [sic] of the N.S.D.A.P. had little understanding concerning the good relations between the prisoners and the camp staff, and accused the latter of being "too lenient" and even suspected them of engaging in "dangerous collaboration" with the enemy.

The first victim of this attitude was the camp's second Kommandant, Major von Stachelski. Simoleit describes what happened:

He [von Stachelski] liked to spend the dull evening hours in the 'casine' barrack, drinking sometimes a little too much beer and wine. One evening, he felt sorry for the 'poor prisoners' who had nothing to drink and he resolved to help

them. Although it was strictly forbidden to give the prisoners any kind of alcohol [sic] he gave orders to fill several boxes with a decent number of beer bottles and went himself to the officers' compound with his gift. Here he was received with great joy. A few days later our young camp doctor visited his superior medical officer in the staff of the commanding general of our military area and told him the beer story as a good joke. But this man regarded it as a very serious affair and reported it to the general.

The next morning suddenly the general appeared in our camp and started a severe investigation. The commandant was removed from his post and had to leave the camp immediately. As I was the second in rank I was appointed commandant of the camp. I was very much surprised by this unexpected "honour" and I was not happy in my new position. The commandant of the camp had the commanding and disciplinary power of a colonel . . . and I was only a captain of the reserve.

I had to take over my new duties and responsibilities in a very difficult time. Rumours had spread over the country, especially in the neighbouring military units that in the camp of Barth there were unbelievable fraternizations and even drinking bouts with the prisoners. We never had so many visitors in our camp than at this time, majors and colonels and even generals. They all wanted to see that strange camp where such things could happen.

First of all they were astonished to find a little captain as the commandant of the camp. It was always a very hard piece of work to convince them that, leaving out the unhappy and uncorrect beer gift to the prisoners, all our work and our whole humane attitude were not a kind of treason but the real and correct execution of the Geneva Convention.

. . . . it was not easy for a captain to quarrel with officers who were all higher in rank. My disciplinary and commanding power of a colonel did not help me very much. Therefore, I demanded again and again [that a higher ranking officer should be appointed] whose rank would make it easier to work for the benefit of the camp. At last Major Burchard for a short time was appointed commandant before the history of 'Stalag Luft I' came to an end.

The camp had only seven officers assigned to it: the commandant, his adjutant, the Abwehr officer (responsible for security), and four officers in a department known as the Lagerfuhrung (of which Simoleit was in charge). The Lagerfuhrung, roughly translated as "the compound control office," served as the constant intermediary between the prisoners and the commandant and the other departments. More will be said later about the duties of the officers assigned to this department, but here it must be noted that the people assigned to this office, perhaps more than any other, came into close personal contact with the prisoners.

It is revealing, then, to learn that Simoleit himself was none too confident about the loyalty of the men working for him in this capacity. Lieutenant Pieber was an Austrian who had lived for a long time in Central and South America. "His experiences in foreign countries," Simoleit asserts, "made him especially able to have excellent contacts with the prisoners." Lieutenant Buckwich, he recalls, was "the genuine type of a liberal, merry, light-hearted Austrian." He further adds that "the relations of [these] two Austrians to the prisoners were so very good that they were not far from becoming risky and dangerous to both sides." In a strange sort of way, Simoleit was more correct than he could ever have imagined or, if he did know the truth behind his words, more than he ever let on.

One day shortly after his arrival at Barth, Wings was dumbfounded to learn that a young officer, Paul Burke, was under sentence of death by his own prison mates for suspected collaboration with the Germans. Burke, it seems, had been spending a great deal of time with

Lieutenant Buckwich.²⁷ Burke told Wings that he and Buckwich had become close friends and that Buckwich had even taken him into a room which contained the primitive seismograph device the Germans were using to detect tunneling activities. Burke had reported this incident to the camp leaders, but they refused to believe him, feeling that no German officer in Buckwich's position could be so amazingly indiscreet. Buckwich then provided Burke with some maps and a magnet for making crude pocket compasses, gave him advice on where they should be hidden, and tipped off Burke accurately on the times and places of a number of German security searches. With the exception of the time when the two men viewed the seismograph, Burke's three roommates were present when he met with Buckwich. Nevertheless, the continuous discovery of tunnels by the Germans created an atmosphere of suspicion in the camp, and Burke was told that a prisoner's court of inquiry was to be held on him. Burke argued that Buckwich was not a German, that he was in fact an Austrian who hated Nazis. A week later Burke was advised that the prisoners considered him a collaborator. Burke suffered as an outcast from that moment until Wings arrived.

Wings immediately appointed another board to inquire into the charges, and it concluded that there was no real case against Burke.

²⁷In his book, Mission Escape, from which this account is taken, Sydney Smith spells Buckwich's name as "Buckvig" and lists him as an Abwehr instead of a Lagerfuhrung officer. It is possible that he is correct and that Simoleit is wrong in both cases, but this would seem unlikely considering the latter's role as Buckwich's supervisor. One possible explanation is that Buckwich became an Abwehr officer as a result of the personnel changes that occurred after Major Stachelski was relieved of command. This would not likely have been the case, however, since the Abwehr was a distinct service command and its members were somewhat out of the camp's normal command structure. The facts of the case otherwise seem correct. See Smith, Mission Escape, 62-63.

He had been found guilty "on a mass of hearsay, suspicion, gossip and a certain amount of the unthinking malice born of discomfort, hunger, boredom and a need for leadership commanding respect." Buckley agreed with Wings that "only mass rivalry, with resulting lack of security, have been responsible for the tunnel discoveries." In an appropriate formal gathering of all the officers in camp, Wings officially exonerated Burke, who in time apparently was accepted back into the fellowship of the other prisoners.²⁸ Other developments suggest that it was indeed Buckwich and not Burke who was the collaborator. But he was not alone, for Simoleit's other subordinate, Lieutenant Pieber, also committed "indiscretions" by helping the prisoners in ways that will be discussed later.

One other German officer became well known to the prisoners at Barth, Feldwebel Hermann Glemnitz, the Officer Compound Sergeant Major (Lagerfeldwebel). He took care of many of the details of camp administration, including everything from the distribution of Red Cross parcels to maintaining the list of occupants in the cooler. Sometimes referred to as "Dimwits" by the brasher young prisoners, Glemnitz was anything but dim-witted. He was extremely observant, intelligent, efficient, and absolutely loyal to his country. The prisoners respected him as a professional soldier, and even though he caused them much anguish in the days they spent in his company, they found that he was one of the few Germans they came into contact with who possessed a genuine sense of humor.²⁹

²⁸Smith, Mission Escape, 62-63.

²⁹Ibid., 78-79.

The Germans, like members of prison staffs throughout the world, fell victim to the prisoners' love of assigning nicknames and using argot language. Thus, the German soldiers assigned to anti-escape duties became known as "ferrets." A German officer or soldier, especially a member of the prison staff, was called a "goon." The guard towers were referred to as "goon-boxes," and the act of provoking the enemy as "goon-baiting." The Germans never quite understood the implications of the word "goon," and the prisoners gave them little to go on. At one point when the Germans asked what it meant, the prisoners answered that it was simply an abbreviation, G.O.O.N., standing for "German Officer of Non-com."³⁰ Actually, its meaning is clearly revealed in the word's origin, a strip cartoon in the Daily Mirror which had depicted "goons" as low-browed, primitive apemen of great strength and stupidity.³¹ The Germans apparently never knew where the word came from, and neither did very many of the later prisoners. It made little difference whether the prisoners knew the word's exact meaning. To them it seems to have served as a way of expressing in shorthand fashion a whole host of undefined but generally negative feelings toward their German captors.

Events at Barth continued at their usual hectic pace right up until the camp was evacuated in April 1942. One morning after Appell, the NCOs were ordered to pack up their belongings and parade at four o'clock in the afternoon with their luggage. When they reported as ordered, they were told to pick up their baggage and march. The

³⁰John A. Vietor, Time Out: American Airmen at Stalag Luft I (New York: Richard R. Smith Publisher, Inc., 1951), 108.

³¹Smith, Mission Escape, 62.

Germans then directed them not outside the compound, but around and around it. With each round the prisoners discarded a little more baggage. This process continued until their path was littered with prisoner of war paraphernalia and the Germans calculated that the prisoners were carrying real necessities. They then marched the prisoners back into the barracks and turned some Russian prisoners loose in the compound to pick up the debris. It is not known whether or not the Russians were allowed to keep their newly-found treasure.³² Two days after this incident in the NCOs' Compound, the first contingent of officers left for their new home in Stalag Luft III. The other officers and NCOs followed shortly.

³²Ibid., 79.

CHAPTER VI

THE KRIEGIE'S DOMAIN

Introduction

When the prisoners from Barth arrived at Stalag Luft III in April 1942, they took up residence in two small compounds, the officers occupying one and the enlisted men the other. Whether or not the community spirit and range of activities they had developed during the formative years would survive and continue to be of benefit to them in their new home depended upon many factors, some tangible, such as the physical environment in which they had to live, and some intangible, such as the conduct and administrative practices of the Germans and the prisoners themselves.

Both the tangibles and intangibles affecting community life can be reduced to a common denominator—obligations. The German staff at Stalag Luft III had two, sometimes conflicting, obligations: to provide care and shelter for the prisoners and to guard them. The prisoners, in turn, really had only one obligation: to look after their own self-interests. The resources and capabilities each side had at its disposal for meeting these obligations can be determined at least in part by examining the physical plant at Stalag Luft III, the makeup of the prisoner population who used the facilities, and the men who led in the continuing efforts to enhance the community spirit among the prisoners.

Stalag Luft III: Home and Battlefield

As the British prisoners walked into their new home—or as many of them now preferred to think of it, their new battlefield—they wondered what it held in store for them. With an experienced eye they surveyed the scene.¹

The camp was located about ninety miles southeast of Berlin and approximately one-half mile south of the small town of Sagan, which boasted a population of about 25,000 people. This placed it in the province of Silesia not far from the old Polish border and on the Bobr River, a tributary of the Oder. The area was well forested, but the trees added little beauty to the setting, being primarily of the thin and scraggly fir variety. The prisoners speculated as to why the camp

¹The description given here is a composite of numerous reports and narratives, many of them rendered by the prisoners themselves. Where conflicting data appeared in the sources, either the most commonly found information has been used or a deliberate determination made based upon the best information available. The following sources were relied upon in this section unless otherwise noted: Sydney Smith, Mission Escape (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1968), 81; Paul Brickhill, The Great Escape, with an Introduction by George Harsh, a Fawcett Crest Book (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1950), 21; Charles G. Goodrich, "History of the USAAF, Prisoners of War of the South Compound, Stalag Luft III" (unpublished manuscript, 1945), Annex II [Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Maxwell AFB, Alabama], hereinafter cited as "History of South Compound"; Delmar T. Spivey, "History of Center Compound" (unpublished manuscript, 1945), 36-37, Spivey Collection [Special Collections Room, USAF Academy Library, Colorado], hereinafter cited as "History"; and a document whose author is known but cannot be named at this time. The document was written just after World War II and carries the title "A History of Stalag Luft III." Verification of the authenticity of the document, as well as comments on its strengths and weaknesses, can be found in a letter from Paul Clark, Office of the Air Attache, Embassy of the United States of America, to Colonel Alfred F. Hurley, Professor and Head, Department of History, USAF Academy, October 15, 1974, which is filed with a copy of the document which in turn is held by the Special Collections Room of the USAF Academy Library, Colorado. Hereinafter cited as "A History of Stalag Luft III." Although this document pertains primarily to escape activities, other information of value is also included in its pages.

had been located there and hit upon several plausible reasons. The spot was well away from all combat zones. It was also far from any friendly or neutral territory. Sandy soil blanketed the entire area, exhibiting several inches of fine gray topsoil mixed with an accumulation of pine needles. Below that, the texture was equally sandy but very light in color. All this posed problems for would-be tunnelers. Dirt brought up from below would show up in stark contrast to the gray matter on top, greatly assisting the Germans in their efforts to detect tunneling activities. Furthermore, extensive shoring would be needed to prevent the tunnels from collapsing on the diggers. On the positive, or the prisoners' side, the soil was virgin and had not been permeated with burrows, and the water level was about three hundred feet below ground level.

The prisoners especially noted the anti-escape devices built into Stalag Luft III. The perimeter fence consisted of two separate and parallel barriers spaced about seven feet apart, each about nine feet high with an overhang at the top pointing inward and consisting of barbed-wire strands placed approximately six inches apart horizontally and two feet apart vertically. Between the two parallel fences lie barbed wire entanglements accumulated to a depth of about two to four feet. Inside the camp and approximately thirty feet from the perimeter fence a warning wire or wooden rail some two feet off the ground marked the inside boundary of a "no-man's land." Anyone stepping over the warning rail in the direction of the perimeter fence would be shot without warning. Outside and along the fence stood guard towers, one at or near each corner and others along the fence at intervals of approximately one hundred to one hundred and fifty yards.

Attached to each one were powerful searchlights and a guard armed with a rifle, a semi-automatic weapon, and a machine gun. The barracks were built off the ground so that the surface beneath could be easily inspected for tunneling activity and were placed in the center of the compound never closer than forty yards from the fence. Beyond the fence the clearing extended another one hundred feet or so to the edge of the woods.

The camp itself was new and well designed for efficient operation. It contained four distinct areas. On the west side a large area, called the "Kommandantur," had been set aside for use by the Germans. In the northeast corner sat the "Vorlager," which contained facilities to be used in common by the prisoners, such as the cooler, sick quarters, shower hut, coal shed, and storage buildings, and several barracks where Russian prisoners used as camp labor workers were housed. The southeast corner comprised the Officers' Compound. Because of its location on the east side of the complex it came to be referred to simply as East Compound. And in the lower center of the complex was the Non-Commissioned Officers' Compound. Again, because it occupied a position close to the center of the camp, it became known as Centre Compound, as well as by the abbreviated title, NCOs' Compound. (See Figure 3).

The inclusion of officers in Stalag Luft III meant that the camp's name would thereafter be misleading. The designation "Stalag" is a contraction of the word Stammlager, which can be interpreted to mean a prison for the "common stock" of the army or, in other words, servicemen below officer ranks. Only a very few such people found themselves in the relative comfort of Stalag Luft III, the majority

STALAG LUFT III (April 1942)

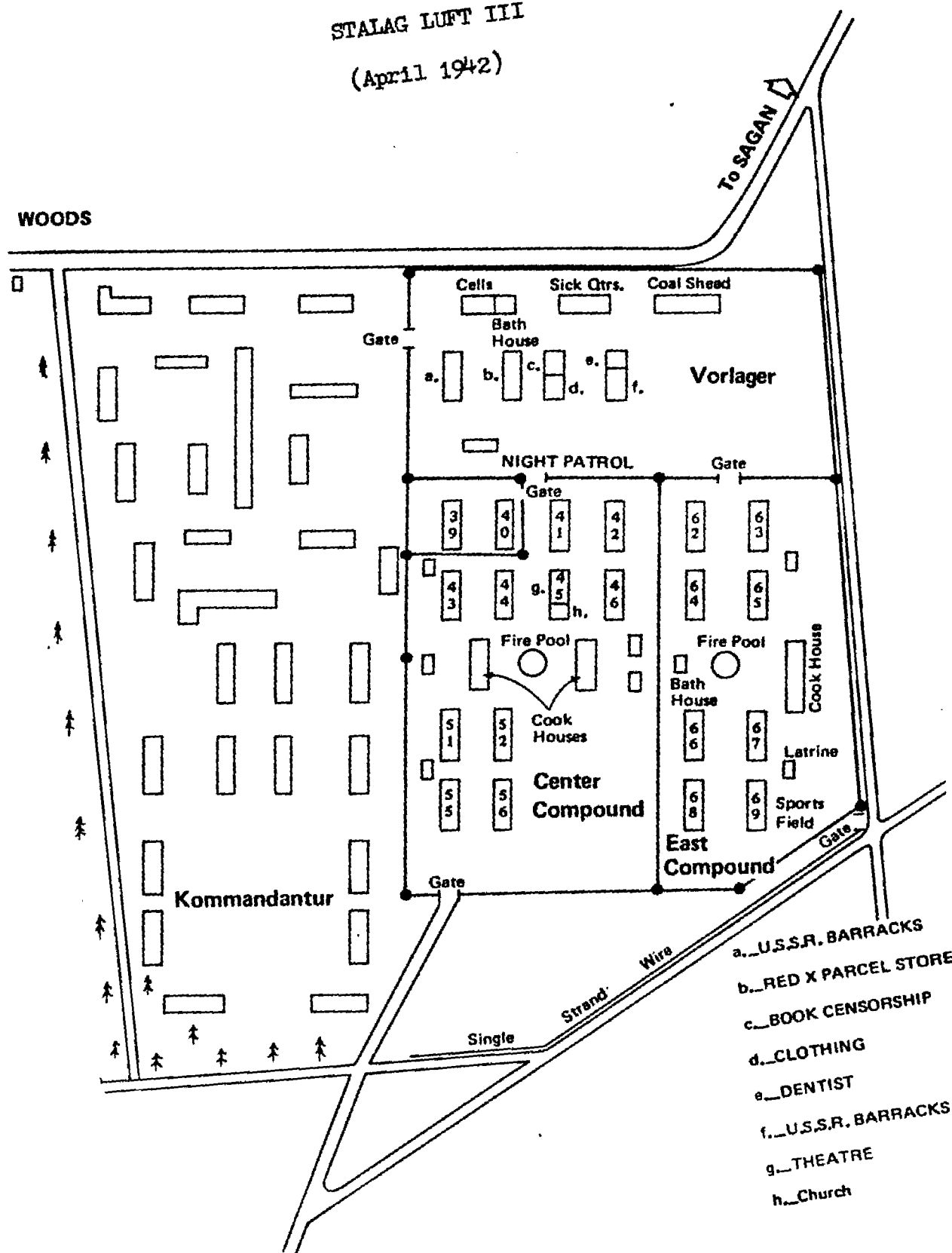


Figure 3

being sent to other Luftwaffe or work camps instead. Considering the men who actually occupied Stalag Luft III, the camp should have been labeled Oflag, or Officers' Camp. At least the Germans were uniformly inconsistent in this mismatch of names because all the Luftwaffe camps were labeled stalags.

The groups which occupied these two compounds were a mixed lot. British airmen comprised the largest group, but other service branches and nationalities were present. Dominion troops from Canada, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand arrived in sizeable numbers, and though they were sometimes identified as being from their respective Air Forces, in the majority of cases they turned up on statistical reports as members of the British contingent. The Polish, Czech, French, Belgian, Dutch, and Norwegian servicemen were primarily individuals who managed to flee their homeland and join in the fighting by becoming British subjects. At one time the Germans viewed these individuals as traitors, but Wings Day argued in their behalf and apparently succeeded in persuading the authorities that these men could not have joined the British military services unless they had first become English citizens, and that they therefore deserved to be treated as Englishmen.²

There were also some Americans in the British ranks at this time. Bill Hall was Stalag Luft III's oldest American prisoner in terms of time spent in captivity. He was shot down on July 2, 1941,

²Report to State Department from J. E. Friedrich, Representative of the International Red Cross regarding a visit to Stalag Luft III on September 13, 1942, File No. 740.00114EW/3049 ["Prisoners of War—European War, 1939"], Record Group 59 [Diplomatic Branch, National Archives]; Smith, Mission Escape, 41.

and although it is uncertain whether he was placed with the British already at Barth, it appears he was among the first to enter Stalag Luft III.³ A total of thirteen Americans turned up on the British and Canadian officer rolls as a result of their having joined the Canadian or British Air Forces before the United States entered the war. The honor of being the first United States Army Air Forces pilot to enter the camp went to Albert P. Clark, a young man of twenty-eight and already a Lieutenant Colonel, who was shot down in a Spitfire in July 1942. Described by one of his fellow prisoners as a "gangling red-headed youngster,"⁴ Clark became the first Senior American Officer or "SAO," and served in that capacity from the time he arrived at Stalag Luft III on August 15, 1942, until March 1943 when a higher ranking American, Colonel Charles Goodrich arrived. By December 1942, a total of sixty-seven USAAF officers lived in East Compound along with the thirteen other Americans mentioned earlier and approximately 550 British and Dominion personnel.⁵

The compound was by then filled, and the Germans began juggling prisoners around until new quarters could be constructed at Stalag Luft III. Actually, a purge of about 100 officers from East Compound

³R. W. Kimball and O. M. Chiesl, Clipped Wings, (n.p.: by the author, n.d.), no pagination.

⁴Paul Brickhill, The Great Escape, 32.

⁵Glenn A. Abbey, American Consul, United States Embassy, London, to the Secretary of State, Washington, December 20, 1943. File No. 711.62114A/192 ["United States Prisoners of War Detained by Germany"], Record Group 59 [Diplomatic Branch, National Archives]; Bern to Secretary of State, Washington, December 11, 1942. File No. 740.00114EW/2828, Record Group 59; Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Annex II. There were a few American enlisted men in Centre Compound at the time but no specific data on them could be found.

and a few NCOs from Centre had been sent to Oflag XXI B (Schubin) in October 1942, but this transfer seems to have been motivated more by the discovery that month of a large and well-engineered tunnel complex than by the need to relieve overcrowding. Those that were removed were primarily members of the escape fraternity. But after January 1943, with the exception of a few small parties from hospitals, virtually all the American and most of the British and Dominion fliers were sent to other camps, mostly to Schubin (located near Thorne in the old Polish Corridor) until more space became available at Sagan.

The American contingent accordingly remained quite small throughout the first year of Stalag Luft III's history. In East Compound the Germans segregated them from the others for quartering purposes only, assigning the Americans to Barrack sixty-nine. They were otherwise allowed to mingle freely and to participate in all camp activities. Because of this free and close association with the other prisoners, the Americans were from the beginning in a position to learn from the more experienced British. Furthermore, though a little mistrustful of each other at first, the Americans and British soon gained each other's confidence and the Americans were able to assume positions of leadership on the compound's internal administrative staff. The experience gained at this time prepared these men for key leadership roles when the Americans began to arrive in large numbers and the compounds became almost totally segregated according to nationality.

East Compound was small compared to those which were built later. It contained eight barracks, one large cookhouse, a bathhouse, two pit-latrines, and a fire pool. The sports field was

small, and activities on it had to be carefully scheduled. Numerous stumps remained in the compound when it first opened, but the Russian workers removed most of them within a few months.

The barracks were drab grayish-green or brown, single-story, wooden buildings, the color variations stemming from the different wood preservatives that had been applied to the outside when they were first constructed, and the effects of aging.⁶ Each barrack contained twelve large rooms equipped with six double-tier bunk beds and two rooms with two double-tier bunk beds each. Until conditions became crowded, two of the large rooms were set aside, one for use as a library and reading room and the other as a recreation room. A large window in each room allowed natural light and fresh air to enter the rooms during daylight hours. At night when the shutters were closed, however, the air often became foul because of the ever present and dense tobacco smoke. Each room also had a small stove to provide heat, but there was seldom sufficient fuel to keep it lit even a few hours a day. One entire hut was set aside for use as a theater and gymnasium. This meant that the remaining seven barracks could comfortably house about 900 men. More prisoners could be accommodated only by converting the bunks from two to three tiers or by using the reading and recreation rooms as regular living quarters.

The wash huts contained cold water spigots and wooden benches with plate basins.⁷ The men shaved, washed their clothes, and often

⁶Interview with Al LaChasse, October 13, 1975.

⁷The difficulty of ascertaining the adequacy of certain facilities is revealed in a comment made in regard to the wash basins. One report states that there was one basin for every four men in East Compound, and implies that this fact indicates that the Germans were

took cold baths or showers in the wash huts.

There were two latrines in East Compound and they became the focal point of much American concern. Each one contained twenty seats and an accumulation pit underneath. The pits were seldom emptied on schedule and the latrine huts had never been properly sealed off on the outside. Consequently, a foul odor pervaded the area, millions of flies bred and swarmed about, and slugs crawled out of the latrines and all over the camp. The British were extremely rank conscious and preferred to stand on principles and to insist that the Germans do something about the problem rather than to stoop to engage in such lowly tasks themselves.

treating the prisoners on par with their own troops by adding that this is "the proportion in the German Army." A quick mathematical check suggests that an error exists somewhere in this equation, however. If the camp could accommodate 900 men, this meant the wash huts should have contained 225 wash basins or about 112 basins each. This obviously was not the case. It is probable that the prisoners' needs could have been adequately met even if more than four men had to use one basin, but that is not the issue. The question is whether or not the prisoners possessed the same sanitation facilities as the German soldiers, and if the soldiers did indeed enjoy such a favorable ratio of men per basin, it is clear that the prisoners were not given the same treatment in this regard. Thus, even though the inspectors often stated that the prisoners were treated the same as the German soldiers, their statements must be subjected to close scrutiny. There is the additional problem that one encounters in making comparisons between the care given the prisoners and that given the German soldiers of not knowing how well the provisions specified on paper correlated with those the troops actually received. Resolving such problems would require extensive research into the conditions that prevailed in the German army at various times. See Protecting Power Report No. 1, concerning a visit made on December 9, 1942, by Mr. Gabriel Naville and Dr. Kurt Schaeffeler of the Swiss Legation at Berlin, "Stalag Luft III" Folder, "Camp Reports-Germany-Stalag Luft" File [American POW Information Bureau, Office of the Provost Marshall General], Record Group 389 [Modern Military Branch, National Archives]. Unless otherwise indicated the descriptive information pertaining to East and Centre Compounds is taken from this report and "A History of Stalag Luft III," Parts I and II.

When Clark arrived in August 1942, he was shocked and disturbed by the unsanitary situation he found in East Compound. Impetigo and dysentery were rampant in the camp. When the prisoners sat down to eat, he recalls, they first had to conduct a "fly purge" which involved opening the window, shutting off the lights, closing the doors, getting shoulder to shoulder with bath towels and shooing all the flies out the window in a black cloud, and then slamming the window closed again before the flies could get back in.

Clark's father was a doctor and Clark had accompanied him on many of his trips to CCC camps in Colorado. He knew what a pit-latrine should look like and how it should be kept, so he went to the Senior British Officer and volunteered to lead a campaign to improve sanitary conditions in the camp. With the SBO's approval, Clark obtained the help of some South Africans and Australians who shared his concern and secured tools and the needed materials on parole from the Germans. The latrines were screened off with mosquito gauze or burlap, and a stack was put on the latrine so that a draft could move down through the holes and up through the stack and take out some of the foul odors. The Germans were so pleased with the results that they adopted these measures wherever possible in the other compounds and camps in Germany.⁸

Centre Compound was larger than East and when full could accommodate about 1,600 prisoners. It contained a cookhouse and thirteen

⁸Interview with Al LaChasse, October 13, 1975; Interview with Albert P. Clark, November 7, 1975; Typewritten transcript of interview between Major General Albert P. Clark and Lieutenant Colonel Ben Pollard, former Vietnam prisoner of war, March 22, 1974. Copy in author's possession, original in Clark Collection [USAF Academy Library, Colorado].

barracks, one of which (number forty-five) was set aside for use as a theater and a recreation room. The theater was described as "the finest seen in any prisoners' camp," its most notable features being a spacious stage and an orchestra pit.

The remaining twelve barracks housed prisoners. They had double walls and floors and were about one hundred and twenty feet long and thirty feet wide. Inside there were two main rooms, each large enough to accommodate seventy men in relative comfort in terms of space but not, of course, with the same degree of privacy afforded in the barracks at East Compound. In addition, there were two small rooms at each end of each barrack. A small kitchen stove was placed in one of the small rooms on each end. One room at either end was used as a night latrine and equipped with plain buckets and a make-shift urinal for use after lockup in the evening. The other small room was used by members of the barrack staff. Each main room was fitted with a large slow-combustion heater generally referred to as a Nuremberg stove. Here again there was seldom enough fuel available to keep the stove lit. Five pit-latrines were eventually built in the compound, but it is not known how many of them were available for use when the camp first opened. Centre also had two cookhouses to serve the larger number of prisoners, and a large sports field.⁹

The same mixture of nationalities was represented in Centre Compound as was mentioned earlier in reference to East Compound.

⁹Interview with John Wells, January 26-27, 1975; Protecting Power Report No. 1, concerning a visit made on December 9, 1942, by Mr. Gabriel Naville and Dr. Kurt Schaeffeler of the Swiss Legation at Berlin, "Stalag Luft III" Folder, "Camp Reports-Germany-Stalag Luft" File, Record Group 389; "A History of Stalag Luft III," Part II, 1-2; Spivey, "History," 65.

Approximately twenty-six enlisted Americans lived in Centre while it was occupied by NCOs.

The official representative or Man of Confidence among the enlisted men was chosen by popular vote rather than being automatically placed in this position by virtue of his rank, as was the senior man among the officers.¹⁰ The American Man of Confidence was Flight Sergeant G. A. Dillard. The British and Dominion prisoners chose Sergeant James Deane, better known as "Dixie Deane." Deane, who had also served in this capacity at Barth, came to be identified as the guiding spirit among the British NCOs much as Wings was among the officers. Another man who became an influential leader among the NCOs was Deane's assistant, Sergeant R. L. R. Mogg.¹¹

Back in East Compound Wings Day served as both the Senior Officer and the Senior Allied Officer until a higher ranking officer, Group Captain H. M. Massey, arrived in June 1942. Massey was an old friend of Wings, the two of them having served together in Egypt, and they both approached their service responsibilities with the same sense of professional commitment. Massey was somewhat handicapped, however, by injuries to his left leg that forced him to walk with a

¹⁰This is in accordance with the Geneva Convention, Section V, Chapter 2, Article 43.

¹¹"A History of Stalag Luft III," Part II, 3 and passim; Report by Mr. Friedrich and Dr. Bubb, Representatives of the International Red Cross, concerning a visit made on February 22, 1943, File No. 740.00114EW/3977, Record Group 59.

noticeable limp.¹² Like Wings, Massey was an experienced officer and considerably older than the rest of the prisoners. He had, in fact, only been on a familiarization mission before going to America to take up an air commodore's job when he was shot down and captured. Upon his arrival in camp, Massey recognized the value of Wings' experience in prisoner affairs and told Wings that he wanted to be SBO in name only and that Wings should continue to lead the prisoners and carry on official relations with the Germans as he had in the past. In actual practice they seem to have shared these tasks as the prisoners were cognizant of Massey's influence in camp and can remember seeing both Massey and Wings meet with the Germans. In October 1942, Wings was sent to Oflag XXI B (Schubin), but Massey remained at Stalag Luft III and served as both the Senior British and the Senior Allied Officer until the following spring when he left the camp to undergo treatment at Oberfmaasfeld hospital. He was assisted by an adjutant and a complete staff which included, among others, the senior officers of the other nationalities represented in the camp.

Sometime during the fall of 1942 the Germans began work on a new compound situated on the west side of the Kommandantur. Because of its physical relationship to the rest of the camp it was briefly referred to as West Compound, but when it became evident that yet

¹²Disagreement exists over the exact nature of Massey's injury. Smith states that he had been wounded in the legs in 1918 and had had trouble ever since, but that his use of a walking stick and the pronounced limp he exhibited in World War II were due to his recent heavy landing when his airplane was shot down. See Smith, Mission Escape, 90-91. Brickhill in The Great Escape, 30, asserts that Massey smashed his foot when he was shot down in the first war, then damaged it again in combat during the thirties in Palestine, and bent it a third time when he bailed out over the Ruhr in 1942.

another compound would have to be built on the west side of the camp, the name was changed from West to North to reflect the relationship between the first and second new compounds, the latter to be built south of and adjacent to North Compound. The second new compound, accordingly, became known as South Compound (see Figure 4).¹³ It opened on March 27, 1943. The majority of the 850 prisoners transferred from East Compound to North made their move on April Fools Day. Only about twenty prisoners (mostly Czechoslovakians) remained in East for a time, but soon Air Force prisoners were brought in from various camps throughout Germany and the compound began to fill up again.

The opening of North Compound marked the beginning of what is sometimes referred to as "the Golden Era" of Stalag Luft III's history. As one prisoner recalls, in the following months "There was plenty of living space, plenty of food, [and] plenty of recreational and athletic activity," altogether almost everything a prisoner could want or expect under the circumstances.¹⁴

North Compound was larger than East and Centre Compounds put together. A Vorlager was attached to it on the north end. In the Vorlager were a shower hut for North Compound prisoners only,

¹³The name change for North Compound was fortunate, for only a short time later yet a third new compound had to be built west of the Kommandantur and it also was named West Compound, only this time the name remained and truly reflected the compound's location on the extreme western edge of the camp. Unfortunately, in many cases the name change is not self-evident in the documents pertaining to the camp and care must be taken to ensure that references to "West" Compound do not in fact pertain to "North" Compound before the name change.

¹⁴Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Introduction. In Chapter XI, evidence will be presented to support the claim that this period was also the "golden era" for escape activities.



714. ARIEL - SOUTH GROUND



715. LOOKING FROM SOUTH
GROUND TOWARD N. 100
GROUND

716. PAULING FLOOR - 100 FT. OF
ST. 210

717. EAST GROUND. THE
ST. 210 FLOOR TUBULE AS SEEN
FROM THE LINE IN THE
GROUND. WHERE THE ST. 210
TUBULES WERE ST. 210



718. LOOKING FROM SOUTH
GROUND TOWARD N. 100
GROUND

storage areas, a cooler, and medical facilities to be used by both North and South Compounds much like the Vorlager east of the Kommandantur was used by both East and Centre Compounds.

Inside the compound there were fifteen barracks, a cookhouse, a large, well-designed theater (built by the prisoners), and a huge sports field. The Germans had planned to build ten additional huts in North, but for some reason never did—hence, the unusually large playing field. With German approval, the prisoners began working on the theater and clearing the stumps out of the athletic area before the compound was opened for occupancy, though much remained to be done on these projects when they moved from East to North Compound in April. North offered a less barren appearance at first since many of the trees were left in the northern half of the compound among the barracks. After a time, however, the Germans concluded that the trees unduly hindered their efforts to detect escape activities and all but a few of them were cut down.

The wooden barracks of North Compound possessed a central corridor flanked by seventeen rooms, each room designed to house four to eight officers. One hut could comfortably accommodate about eight men, and the entire compound about twelve hundred. The barracks were more self-contained than those in East and Centre, each one having its own tea kitchen, washing and toilet facilities, day-room, and a room for the orderlies apart from the sleeping rooms for the officers. Several wardrobes were included in each room and were used by the prisoners to store food and other personal belongings.

The washroom located in the center of each building had twelve to sixteen cold water faucets. The prisoners could take cold showers

in the washrooms, but this appears to have been a stopgap measure that became necessary when all trips to the Vorlager for hot showers were stopped after two escape attempts in June 1943 involving two groups of prisoners being escorted to the showers by other prisoners disguised as German guards. The ban on hot showers in the Vorlager lasted for months, and the prisoners resorted to the use of hoses attached to spigots on one end and to a punched tin can on the other. The latrines in the barracks were mainly for nighttime use. During the day the prisoners used large pit-latrines in the compound.¹⁵

Among those entering North Compound were several hundred prisoners that had been gathered at Schubin to await the opening of the new facility at Stalag Luft III. One of them was an American colonel, Charles Goodrich. Wings spotted Goodrich one day while they were both at Schubin, Goodrich sitting quietly about three rows back listening to a briefing given newcomers on all aspects of life in a prisoner of war camp. A 1925 graduate of West Point, Goodrich hailed from the South. About thirty-five years of age, he was an unassuming, mature-looking officer of medium height and stocky build, with wiry red hair and a complexion to match. "Roho," as he was called, immediately became part of the senior staff at Schubin. Though he outranked Wings, Goodrich was content to spend his time learning as

¹⁵Protecting Power Report No. 3 concerning a visit made on July 6-7, 1943, by Mr. Gabriel Naville, representative of the Swiss Legation at Berlin, "Stalag Luft III" Folder, "Camp Reports-German-Stalag Luft" File, Record Group 389; Report by Dr. Lehner, International Red Cross representative, concerning a visit made on July 26, 1943, File No. 711.62114 A.I.R./30 ["Reports of Inspection of Camps for American Prisoners in Germany"], Record Group 59 [Diplomatic Branch, National Archives]; "A History of Stalag Luft III," Part III, 1-3; Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Introduction.

much as possible about prison camp affairs in preparation for his duties as Senior American Officer, and Wings continued to serve in his now well-recognized role as camp leader. They became close personal friends and before long Goodrich was privy to everything that was going on among the prisoners in terms of internal organization, camp administration, and clandestine activities. Goodrich was transferred from Schubin to Stalag Luft III before the others, and he and one British officer arrived in East Compound in March 1943 just before the prisoners in East moved to North. At that point he replaced Clark as the Senior American Officer.¹⁶

After the move to North Compound, Colonel Goodrich gathered all the Americans, a total of about 300 men, into the group of barracks numbered from 105 through 108, inclusive. Other than this physical separation for quartering purposes, however, the entire compound functioned as a unit. Goodrich was consulted in matters of policy, and the Americans participated in every camp activity and organization.

When the Schubin group arrived in North Compound in late April, Massey remained in command as the Senior British Officer but asked Wings to resume his former active role in camp affairs. In late May Massey went to Oberfmaasfeld hospital and Wings served as the SBO from then until the end of September when another higher ranking officer, Group Captain D. E. L. Wilson, Royal Australian Air Force, arrived and took over as the senior officer. Wilson held this position

¹⁶Interview with Charles Goodrich, February 25, 1975, and November 18, 1975; letter from Goodrich to the author, November 21, 1975; Smith, Mission Escape, 99.

until Massey returned in November, at which time Massey resumed command and served as SBO until May 1944. He was then repatriated to England because of his injuries, and Group Captain Wilson again became the SBO and remained in command until the end of the war.¹⁷

The summer of 1943 marked a major turning point in the history of Stalag Luft III, for at that time the camp's population began to grow rapidly and change in national complexion. The transformation was symbolically highlighted in a comic affair that took place in North Compound. One morning, just after the Germans had unlocked the barrack doors and while the sun was still edging up behind the pine trees, a sudden commotion caused a stir among the British prisoners and alerted the guards of North Compound. The American contingent had begun a boisterous march toward the British barracks. Leading their ranks was a group of drummers and buglers, a man dressed like Paul Revere, and some forty whooping Indians. The British caught the spirit of the day and joined in the parade, many of them still in their pajamas. It was the Fourth of July, 1943 and the Americans had organized to share the joys of this festive occasion with their prison mates. Homemade brew flowed freely. The senior officers, among others, ended up in the pool of water kept on hand to fight fires. Although wary at first that the uproar might be the signal for a general uprising, the Germans let the celebration run its course once they realized it was merely an Independence Day celebration. That evening, one report indicates, the Germans took an unresponsive

¹⁷"A History of Stalag Luft III," Part III, 1; Smith, Mission Escape, 110.

roll call by counting the listless forms in their bunks.¹⁸

The affair was more than a memorable celebration. It spoke volumes about conditions in the camp and the state of morale and cooperation between the American and British prisoners. It was also a microscopic replay of history, for the Americans were once again about to embark upon the path of independence. Just a few weeks before the celebration the Germans had announced that they were building a new compound on the south side of North Compound and that it was to house only Americans. Thereafter, the Germans hoped, the Americans and British could be strictly separated by nationality. This action was in full accordance with the Geneva Convention which stipulated that whenever possible prisoners of different races or nationalities were not to be assembled in the same compound.¹⁹ The Germans never succeeded entirely in their efforts to separate the prisoners, but they came close: by the time the camp was evacuated, all but about 600 out of a total of 10,000 prisoners were in the respectively designated American and British compounds.

Even before South Compound opened, the prisoners found themselves on the move. In June 1943 all but fifty of the eighteen hundred NCOs that lived in Centre Compound were transferred to Stalag Luft VI near Heydekrug in order to make room for the Americans who were to be sent to Centre. One report notes that, while the Germans

¹⁸Smith, Mission Escape, 119; Brickhill, The Great Escape, 85-87, also gives a vivid description of this celebration. Also see Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Annex II, which points out that no one dishonored themselves by their conduct during the day's festivities.

¹⁹Title III, Section II, Article 9.

openly stated their intention to make Centre an American compound, they permitted British officers to move from East to Centre for about six months so that they might serve as advisors to the Americans being sent there since most of them arrived directly from Dulag Luft and possessed no experience in compound administration.²⁰

The NCOs had caused a great deal of damage in Centre Compound. They had left behind them broken windows and torn out wiring and had half-dismantled the latrines to obtain firewood and boards for shoring tunnels. Straw and dirt lay on the floors everywhere. Many of those who arrived in the compound at this time suffered from poor health and were in no condition to undertake a major cleanup. Others who arrived were under the impression that they would be there only a short time awaiting transfer to another camp.²¹ The most capable group of men in the camp refused to do the work. These were the fifty NCOs who remained behind when the others moved to Stalag Luft VI. Ostensibly they had done so in order to serve as orderlies for the incoming officers but, in reality, they stayed simply because they had

²⁰"A History of Stalag Luft III," Part IV, 1.

²¹Protecting Power Report No. 3 covering the visit of July 6-7, 1943, made by Mr. Gabriel Naville, representative of the Swiss Legation at Berlin, "Stalag Luft III" Folder, "Camp Reports-Germany-Stalag Luft" File, Record Group 389; Report by Y.M.C.A. Secretary Henry Soderberg on a visit made on July 14, 1943, "Stalag Luft III" Folder, "Camp Reports-Germany-Stalag Luft" File, Record Group 389; Report by Dr. Lehner of the International Red Cross regarding a visit on July 26, 1943, File No. 711.62114 A.I.R./30 ["Reports of Inspection of Camps for American Prisoners in German"], Record Group 59 [Diplomatic Branch, National Archives]; Thomas E. Mulligan, Lyman B. Burbank, and Robert R. Brunn, "History of Center Compound, Stalag Luft III, Sagan, Germany" (unpublished manuscript, 1945), Part I, Section 1a [Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Maxwell AFB, Alabama], hereinafter cited as "History of Center Compound."

a promising tunnel under construction. By September their tunnel had been discovered and the compound still had to be cleaned up.²²

The cleanup campaign in Centre finally got under way in September under the direction of Colonel Delmar T. Spivey who had just become the new Compound Commander. Spivey was a West Point classmate of Colonel Goodrich and was also a southerner. Tall, slender, and somewhat bald, Colonel Spivey, like the other older men who arrived before and after him, brought badly needed experience into the compound with him. His West Point training, eighteen years of active service in the Regular Army and Army Air Forces, and command experience at large facilities in the States made him an excellent candidate to direct the tasks that lie ahead. The day after he arrived in camp he was taken into North Compound where he stayed for two weeks. During this time he received a very thorough and valuable introduction to prison camp life from Colonel Goodrich and the other knowledgeable men who lived and worked there. He was briefed on all phases of camp operations and shown the tunnels and other escape activities underway in North Compound. Spivey took back with him to Center²³ an experienced and capable group of men to serve on his staff, as well as some definite ideas on what needed to be done to make life in Center more atuned to what he had seen in North.

²²"A History of Stalag Luft III," Part IV, 3; Spivey, "History," 50.

²³Except in quotations where the British spelling "Centre" might be used, the American spelling will be followed in all further references to this compound since that is the spelling applied to it in most documentary sources after the American officers began to occupy the compound in the summer of 1943.

Upon arriving in the compound, Spivey met with the other senior officers in Center. The Senior British Officer who had been in charge since the officers began to occupy Center was Squadron Leader L. W. V. Jennens. Jennens was replaced as SBO in September by Squadron Leader S. G. Pritchard. The problems Jennens faced can well be imagined from what has already been said about conditions in the compound after the NCOs moved out. As for Pritchard, Spivey concluded that he possessed "the finest quality of manhood and integrity," and that he also wanted to put the compound "on a paying basis but more slowly and leisurely than . . . the senior Americans."²⁴ Spivey also encountered the man who served as the Senior American Officer, Major MacMillan, a pilot from Texas who was "the type of American youth who won [the] war . . . smart, energetic, enthusiastic, and endowed with a world of precious humor and horse sense which pulled many an American through in the months to come."²⁵ Spivey sat down with MacMillan and the members of his staff and worked out a program for cleaning up and organizing the compound. The methods they adopted and the organizational structure they decided upon largely conformed with those utilized in the other compounds and will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Within two months, Center Compound began to function normally and efficiently, and the prisoners achieved the sense of community so obviously lacking during the first month after the NCOs departed.

²⁴Spivey, "History," 50-51; "A History of Stalag Luft III," Part IV, 2.

²⁵Spivey, "History," 50.

In spite of their best efforts, the prisoners in Center Compound were doomed to suffer from a lower standard of living than those who lived in the other compounds. Although the compound was only a little over a year old when the officers began to move in, the construction of the buildings was so poor that the prisoners might as well have been living in very old facilities. The roofs leaked, the lighting and heating fixtures were woefully inadequate, and general repairs had been consistently neglected. In addition, the large open bay rooms did not provide either the privacy or the comfort of the enclosed rooms found in all the other compounds. The prisoners managed as best they could and grouped four to six beds around some room furniture. These self-styled rooms became known as "combines," and the men in each combine shared their food and surroundings much as they would have if they had lived in an enclosed room. But the noise, drafts, and general confusion that often arises in large rooms were always present, and there was simply no way for the prisoners to compensate adequately for the lack of walls between them.

The long-awaited South Compound opened on September 8, 1943. Virtually all the American prisoners previously detained in North Compound plus a number of Americans from Center Compound and from the now-German-controlled prisoner of war camps in Italy moved into South. This meant that South was occupied from the beginning by a corps of experienced individuals who were capable of organizing themselves and operating in accordance with proven methods. The guiding spirit behind the community building effort in South Compound was Colonel Goodrich, who served as the commanding officer of the prisoners assigned to South from the time the compound opened until the end of

the war.

South Compound was considerably smaller than North, but it contained the same number of buildings—sixteen. Thus the sports field was only about one-third as large as the one found in North. In the beginning, the compound was filled with stumps which the prisoners removed over a period of months, beginning with the area set aside for the athletic field. The buildings were constructed with prefab materials made of wood, and the fourteen barracks were self-contained much like those in North. Each one had an indoor latrine with one urinal and two commodes, a washroom with six porcelain wash basins, and a kitchen with one cooking range. The indoor latrines were only for nighttime use, and the usual pit-latrines were utilized during the day. The rooms varied in size and accommodated from two to ten people, the largest room measuring sixteen by twenty-eight feet. Each barrack could comfortably house seventy-two officers and twelve enlisted men, or a total of eighty-four people. The entire compound could thus hold about 1,175 men without overcrowding.²⁶ The Germans placed a shower hut in the compound, but for over nine months failed to provide the equipment necessary for its operation. During this time the prisoners had no hot showers and had to settle for the usual hose and punched-can showers that could be rigged up from the cold water spigots. The compound also contained a large cookhouse and a theater built by the prisoners.

The heavy influx of prisoners into the camp throughout the summer and fall of 1943 as a result of increased bombing activity soon

²⁶Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3A (4).

filled the barracks in every compound to capacity. In October the British began to put eight men in the six-man rooms and ten men in the eight-man rooms. In November the same process was initiated in South Compound. Still conditions were not terribly crowded.

Some relief on housing pressures came in January and March 1944 when the Germans opened Belaria and West Compounds. Around January 10, 1944, approximately 500 British prisoners from East and Center Compounds were transferred to Belaria where they immediately began the now familiar process of building another community in new surroundings. Belaria was situated about three miles west of Stalag Luft III on a grassy hill overlooking the town of Sagan. The surrounding countryside consisted of flat agricultural land with few trees and clay soil. The water level was only a few feet below the surface. A strong wind blew through the camp because of its exposed location, but the wind reportedly made the compound a healthier place to live than it might otherwise have been. For a time the site had served as a training camp for German troops, and then as a camp for NCO Air Force prisoners, whereupon it was designated Stalag Luft IV. Later Stalag Luft IV was relocated to Gross Tychow, and Belaria was attached to Stalag Luft III as an officers' compound. It was in fact a semi-independent camp since it possessed its own Kommandant. For most of its goods and services, however, it had to rely upon the facilities and personnel located in or near the main camp south of Sagan. This divided existence was intended to be only temporary. The Germans planned to build a new and separate complex around the Belaria Compound designed eventually to accommodate an estimated 5,000 prisoners. In July 1944, the Germans began construction on

another compound at Belaria with a projected completion date of October 1, but it is not clear whether it was ever finished and opened. Approximately 1,200 prisoners, including at least 113 Americans, but mostly British and Dominion fliers, lived in Belaria Compound by January 1945 when it too was evacuated. Group Captain J. C. MacDonald served as the Senior British Officer and Lieutenant Colonel V. E. Warford was the Senior American Officer.

At first the accommodations at Belaria consisted of six wooden barracks built on brick supports. By September 1944, four more barracks had been constructed. Each one was divided into rooms large enough for eight to ten people. The rooms did not become overcrowded until early 1945 when as many as sixteen men had to live in each room. But almost from the beginning crowding was a real problem in other respects because of the severe shortage of common rooms. When the compound opened in January, six rooms (one room in each barrack) were set aside for use as common rooms, libraries, and lecture rooms. Already by the end of February four of these rooms had to be reclaimed as living quarters. Of the remaining two rooms, one was used as a fiction library and the other as a reference library and reading room. In the evening these same two rooms were used as common rooms for the occupants of the barracks in which they were situated, the other barracks having no such facility. To make matters worse, the compound sports field was only large enough for playing such sports as basketball or volleyball. A barbed wire enclosure adjacent to the compound later provided ample room for other sports, but the prisoners were allowed only very limited access to the field since guards had to accompany them there, and frequently there were not enough guards

available for this duty.

Belaria belonged to about the same vintage as East and Center and possessed about the same kind of sanitation facilities as those two compounds. There were two wash huts with adequate provisions for cold running water, but no proper bathing facilities or hot showers were available. The necessary materials for hot showers were ordered, but it is not known if they were installed in time to be of use to the prisoners.²⁷

West Compound was the last addition to Stalag Luft III, and it received its first large purge of prisoners on April 27, 1944, just two years to the month from the time the first prisoners walked into East and Centre Compounds.²⁸ It was the largest of the six compounds and contained seventeen barracks, a cookhouse, a theater, a shower

²⁷Protecting Power Report No. 5 concerning a visit made on February 22-24, 1944, by Gabriel Naville, Representative of the Swiss Legation in Berlin, File No. 711.62114 A.I.R./137, Record Group 59; Report by Dr. Rossel and Dr. Thudichum of the International Red Cross concerning a visit on November 24-25, 1944, "Stalag Luft III" Folder, "Camp Reports-Germany-Stalag Luft" File, Record Group 389; American Legation, Bern, Switzerland to Secretary of State, Washington, June 19, 1944, File No. 711.62114A/669, Record Group 59; "A History of Stalag Luft III," Part V, 1-2.

²⁸Different dates have been given for the opening of West Compound. April 1, 1944, is given in Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 1, and April 27 is listed in Bob Neary, Stalag Luft III; Sagan . . . Nuremberg . . . Moosburg, A Collection of German Prison Camp Sketches with Descriptive Text Based on Personal Experiences (North Wales, Pa: by author, 1946), 1. Hereinafter cited as Stalag Luft III; Sagan. The April 27 date appears to be the correct one, however, since Appendix VI of Goodrich's "History of South Compound" gives the names of fifty individuals who departed South Compound for West Compound on that day. It is possible, however, that a smaller contingent of prisoners were sent to West Compound on April 1, since in an earlier portion of the South Compound history the comment is made that "In April of 1944, eleven officers and fourteen men were sent as a nucleus to open West Compound," and this does not seem to have been part of the larger group of fifty prisoners mentioned above that were transferred to West on April 27.

building, and a laundry hut.

As in North and South Compounds, the barracks in West Compound were self-contained, and possessed thirteen rooms accommodating from two to fifteen men each, a washroom, tiny kitchen, and a night latrine. Again, pit-latrines were provided for daytime use. Like the barracks in all the other compounds, those in West were very poorly constructed. The roofs leaked, and in the winter the icy winds prevailing in that part of Germany sifted through the cracks in the floors and outer walls, causing great discomfort to the occupants.²⁹

Colonel Darr Alkire served as the Commander of West Compound until the end of the war. He and a group of other experienced prisoners from South Compound understood the task of organizing the new community after the compound opened and by mid-summer they had everything running smoothly.

By the fall of 1944, the prisoners' comfort and well-being came to depend more and more on the success of their community efforts. In the six months from April to November 1944, the prisoner population doubled from a little over 5,000 to more than 10,000. Crowding became very serious, and in most of the compounds prisoners had to live in tents until a third tier could be added to all the bunks. Sleeping space could be provided by use of this expedient, but the living space in the rooms could not be correspondingly enlarged, and all the available facilities, as well as the prisoners' nerves, began to be overtaxed. In addition, food became more and more scarce, and the prisoners began to suffer from malnutrition. They were less

²⁹Neary, Stalag Luft III: Sagan, 4.

able to withstand the cold and more susceptible to respiratory infections and other diseases. Many of them tried to conserve their energy and body heat by remaining in bed as much as possible. And as the Russians closed in on the Eastern Front, the prisoners became increasingly restless and anxiety-ridden. And yet, when Brigadier General Arthur W. Vanaman arrived in Stalag Luft III in August 1944, he marveled at how well everything was organized and how smoothly and efficiently the prisoner community functioned.

Vanaman's arrival in the camp created quite a stir. The prisoners were well aware that as a group of trained and combat experienced fliers, they represented a valuable resource for the Allies. Some anticipated a rescue attempt might be made on their behalf either by means of a spearhead attack on the Eastern Front or by a parachute drop designed to secure the immediate area long enough to permit their evacuation by air. It seemed logical that if a rescue was to be attempted, an advance man would be sent into the camp to prepare the prisoners, and some speculated that Vanaman had arrived for just that purpose. The evidence seemed incontrovertible. Vanaman had served as an Assistant Air Attache in Berlin from July 1937 to July 1941. He was personally acquainted with Goering and other Nazi officials and knew how they thought; he spoke German fluently; and he was familiar with the countryside. As a general officer, the prisoners reasoned, Vanaman would not have been flying over enemy territory had he not been sent on a special mission. The fact that the plane Vanaman was in had returned to England added credence to the special mission idea, as did the fact that he reportedly had turned down an opportunity to live in a camp designed especially for

general officers and had insisted instead on being sent to Stalag Luft III.³⁰

All the pieces seemed to fit, but they did not add up to the true circumstances surrounding Vanaman's arrival in camp. Vanaman had in fact only a short time before become Doolittle's Chief of Intelligence in Eighth Air Force. Observing that intelligence officers too often briefed aircrews on conditions in enemy territory that they themselves had never seen, Vanaman decided that it would be good for the intelligence officers to take orientation flights. He determined that he would set an example by being the first to go. Since he had been briefed on "Ultra," (the system whereby the Allies had broken and were exploiting the German secret code), Vanaman had to obtain special permission from Doolittle before he could go on a mission. Permission was granted and Vanaman soon found himself over enemy territory and in the midst of heavy anti-aircraft fire. The plane he was in received battle damage and caught on fire, and since he was in the aft part of the aircraft at the time and all communications with the cockpit were rendered inoperative when the plane was hit, he assumed that when he turned around and saw two crewmen going through the hatch that the order to bail out had somehow been given and that he should follow them without delay. After Vanaman jumped, the pilot managed to stabilize the aircraft, put out the fire, and return to England.

Vanaman evaded capture that night but was caught the following day and spent four weeks in the hospital at Frankfurt. He was treated well and given an aide who, he correctly concluded, was primarily

³⁰Interview with Albert P. Clark, April 7, 1973.

interested in gathering anything of intelligence value that Vanaman might let slip. Vanaman knew that he had to be extra careful so as not inadvertently to divulge information on Ultra, and he kept his guard up at all times. He obviously succeeded in keeping the secret to himself.

The Germans repeatedly told him about a special camp they had near Dresden for accommodating general officers and other dignitaries who became prisoners, and said that they would send him there. Before doing so, however, they sent him to the Air Ministry in Berlin where he encountered an old German acquaintance. Realizing that here was an opportunity to make his bid for going to an Air Force prison camp, Vanaman confronted the unsuspecting officer in a scene which Vanaman describes:

Knowing German psychology, I just took the bull by the horns and pounded on the table and said you can't send me down there: [to the special camp] I am going to the largest place that we have. I don't know where it is, but that's where you're going to take me. I pounded on the table pretty hard and I don't know if that had any effect or not. But anyway, we [sped] to the train and [I ended up at] Sagan.³¹

Although Vanaman did not go to Stalag Luft III as part of a giant rescue operation, he nevertheless had an important role to play when he arrived in August 1944. It was reassuring to the prisoners to have someone of his rank and experience in camp. At a time when virtually all contact had been cut off between the compounds, Vanaman was one man who could still sign a parole and visit the three American compounds. And he did so. He recognized the splendid work done by the compound commanders and their staffs, in fact by virtually all of

³¹Interview with Arthur W. Vanaman, April 2-3, 1973.

the prisoners who had worked so hard to create communities that functioned well and met the basic needs of the majority of the men. As the Senior American Officer, he envisioned a two-fold role for himself: to boost the prisoners' morale merely by sharing their hardships and making himself visible, and to negotiate with the Germans whenever possible on the prisoners' behalf. In this regard, he stood ready to use his rank for any task that might require the special force rank carried in World War II Germany. He did not get around to see all of the prisoners as much as he would have liked, but in Center Compound where he lived the prisoners came to know and admire him. They were pleased when he sent away a truckload of furnishings for his room that Goering reportedly had sent to him in the camp. And although most of the prisoners never knew the details of what happened, the time also came when Vanaman's rank did become an important factor in their safety and welfare.

CHAPTER VII

THEIR DAILY BREAD

Introduction

The prisoners' main obligation was to look after their own interests, and to a large extent, under the provisions of the Geneva Convention, the Germans were obligated to help them. In this regard the German record was far from perfect, but the general consensus is that the Germans who operated Stalag Luft III probably did all they could for the prisoners considering the exigencies of war and Behemoth's hold over much of their country.

The fact remains that in spite of the German staff's efforts, the prisoners still did not always receive their daily bread, nor were they given adequate clothing or proper medical supplies. In order to obtain these and other important items, the prisoners had to turn to outside agencies such as the Protecting Power, the Y.M.C.A., and the Red Cross. Furthermore, they had to function at peak efficiency as a community in order to secure the maximum possible use from every resource that came into their hands. The Germans do deserve credit for observing those provisions of the Convention which allowed outside agencies to provide items they themselves would not or could not give the prisoners. They also deserve credit for not interfering any more than they did in the prisoners' internal affairs. These two concessions, combined with the physical plant described in the last

chapter and the German camp administrative system described below, comprise the Germans' most significant contributions to the prisoners' welfare and are indicative of the ways in which they established the large parameters affecting conditions in camp. Within those parameters, the prisoners looked after their own interests with a high degree of vigor and ingenuity, largely by developing their own comprehensive and detailed administrative system.

German Administration

With the exception of the Kommandant and Abwehr Officer, virtually the entire German staff accompanied the prisoners when they moved from Barth to Stalag Luft III. The Germans brought with them a thorough knowledge of their crafty ways and multifarious activities. The recent troubles with higher authorities were also fresh in their minds. The staff eventually grew from the seven officers and one hundred or so guards to approximately thirty-five officers and about 1,200 men by late 1944. The number of German personnel in the camp fluctuated but generally hovered around ten per cent of the number of prisoners according to one estimate.¹

¹Gustav Simoleit to Delmar T. Spivey, March 17, 1948, Spivey Collection [Special Collections Room, USAF Academy Library, Colorado]. This estimate is considerably lower than one made by Aidan Crawley who states that, even though the number of prisoners increased as the war went on, "at no time was there less than one guard to four prisoners" at Sagan. This would have meant that there were approximately 2,500 guards alone in the camp. If he is correct, the prisoners obviously succeeded in making their point that the Germans could expect to achieve no economies in the guarding of Luftwaffe prisoners. On the other hand, Simoleit, who served as Deputy Kommandant at Sagan from the time the camp opened until it closed, was certainly in a position to know how many German personnel were in the camp. Unfortunately, no independent data are readily available to reconcile the discrepancy in the figures. Aidan Crawley, Escape from Germany: A History of R.A.F. Escapes During the War (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), 15. Hereinafter cited as Escape.

The same seven administrative departments that existed at Barth were incorporated into the system at Stalag Luft III. The Kommandant, of course, was the most important man in the chain of command. He controlled virtually all affairs in the camp in accordance with rules and regulations imposed from above and by the influence of his own personality.

Altogether, four different Kommandants were assigned to Stalag Luft III. The first one, Colonel Stephani, who was new in his position, did not speak English and had no experience with prisoners. He was replaced within a month by Colonel Friedrich-Wilhelm von Lindeiner-Wildau. When von Lindeiner assumed command of the camp in May 1942, he was sixty-one years old, had a distinguished military career with two iron cross awards from World War I to his credit, and had clearly indicated his displeasure with the recent turn of events in his beloved Germany. Severely wounded three times in World War I, he was never able to return to active combat. He served as aide-de-camp to Prince Joachim, the Emperor's youngest son and became head of the guards at court. After the war he went into business and nourished an interest in politics, inspired in part by his brother who was a respected member of parliament in Germany. Concerning his views on the Nazi rise to power, he stated:

. . . I opposed the penetration of Nasism in the many clubs and societies of which I was either a president or a member of the board in the Netherlands, during my stay there from 1919 till 1932. After my return to Germany I refused every connection with the party till I was removed from the upper German sport-board on that account. Only in spring 1937 my notification to the party as an "Anwärter" [aspirant] ensued, as I belonged to the central staff of the Firm "Schenker & Co., . . . which had been swallowed by the German Government. I do not know whether

I was a real member. I left the firm at the end of 1937. When I accepted an appointment in the Airforce Ministry [sic] in 1938 I was influenced by my wish to get rid of my connection with the party.²

In the Air Ministry, von Lindeiner served as a member of Goering's personal staff.³ When he came to Stalag Luft III he brought with him his Dutch baroness wife, who settled in Sagan.

Most observers have rated von Lindeiner very highly as a camp commander. He was well educated, spoke English fluently, and was extremely capable. One report states that he was a man with whom "a shouting match was out of the question,"⁴ but another source says that although von Lindeiner was generally quite courteous and considerate, he was also "liable to fits of uncontrolled rage. At one point he personally threatened one of the POWs with a pistol." The same source goes on to add, however, that von Lindeiner "was more friendly . . . to POW requests than any other commandant," and that

²Colonel von Lindeiner-Waldau to Delmar T. Spivey, June 22, 1948, Spivey Collection. Other letters from von Lindeiner and his wife to Spivey, including those dated July 31, 1948, and October 22, 1964, from which most of the above information on von Lindeiner's career was extracted, may be found in the Spivey Collection under Lindeiner's name. Mention of von Lindeiner's political awareness and his brother's role in parliament is made in a short unpublished manuscript written by Gustav Simoleit entitled "Organization and Administration of the Prisoner of War Camp Nr. III of the Air Force," enclosed in Simoleit to Spivey, December 19, 1968, Spivey Collection, hereinafter cited as "Organization and Administration." Unless otherwise indicated the information in the section on German administration is extracted from Simoleit's manuscript.

³Sydney Smith, Mission Escape (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1968), 80.

⁴Ibid., 111.

"it was during his regime only that weekly conferences between the Senior Allied POWs and the German staff occurred."⁵ Perhaps the most telling comment on the man came from the prisoner who wrote: "No Kommandant, to a prisoner, is a good man, but I think von Lindeiner was."⁶ He served as Kommandant until shortly after the mass escape in March 1944, when he was relieved of command, arrested, and tried and convicted by the German government on a variety of charges, most of which centered upon his having treated the prisoners too leniently.⁷

Von Lindeiner was replaced for a short time by Lieutenant Colonel Cordes, but he served only on an interim basis until Colonel Braune, the fourth and last Kommandant, could be appointed.⁸ Colonel Braune reportedly was "exceedingly severe, but . . . quite fair." His great drawback was "his complete lack of knowledge of the English language and the American mentality."⁹ Although his manner was direct

⁵Charles G. Goodrich, "History of the USAAF, Prisoners of War of the South Compound, Stalag Luft III" (unpublished manuscript, 1945), Part I, Section 2B [Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Maxwell AFB, Alabama]. Hereinafter cited as "History of South Compound."

⁶Paul Brickhill, The Great Escape, with an Introduction by George Harsh, A Fawcett Crest Book (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1950), 168.

⁷For a good account of his trial and subsequent difficulties first with the German government for being too easy on the prisoners and then with the British for being implicated in the murder of fifty of the prisoners who escaped, see von Lindeiner to Spivey, July 31, 1948, von Lindeiner Folder, Spivey Collection. Von Lindeiner was in fact totally innocent of the murders.

⁸Colonel Braune's first name does not appear in any of the official reports or other sources that were examined. For the circumstances surrounding Cordes' assumption of command and his brief tenure, see von Lindeiner to Spivey, July 31, 1948, von Lindeiner Folder, Spivey Collection.

⁹Protecting Power Report No. 7 concerning a visit made on

and businesslike, he was able to stop the misunderstandings that had been allowed to continue for some time regarding the actions of guards who shot into the camp with increasing frequency during the spring and summer of 1944.¹⁰

The Kommandant was assisted in his duties by an experienced staff. The largest group under his command was the guards, most of whom were very young, very old, or otherwise unfit for duty at the front. In spite of these personal limitations which normally restricted their use in combat, the guards were constantly rotated out of camp for other duties. As with all the other German personnel in the camp, the guards understood that if they failed in their duties, they could expect to be sent to the Russian Front, a fate most of them considered to be synonymous with death.

The camp adjutant, known as Department II, performed the functions of adjutants everywhere. He took care of all the necessary military business and personnel matters pertaining to the German staff but had little contact with the prisoners.

Department II was comprised of various Abwehr people whose main duties were to maintain camp security and prevent escapes. It was Department III which searched the prisoners when they first entered the camp, searched the barracks on a routine basis, and probed every corner of the compounds in an effort to uncover escape activities. The men who worked inside the compounds were the ones the prisoners

July 19, 1944, by Gabriel Naville and Albert A. Kadler, Representatives of the Swiss Legation at Berlin, File No. 711.62114 A.I.R./8-3044 ["Reports of Inspection of Camps for American Prisoners in Germany"], Record Group 59 [Diplomatic Branch, National Archives].

¹⁰Goodrich, "A History of South Compound," Part I, Section 2B.

called "ferrets," and they could be easily spotted because of their dark blue utility coveralls designed to withstand the wear received when the ferrets performed their work under, around, and inside the barracks and other buildings. One officer and six NCO ferrets were assigned to each compound, and they paraded among the prisoners from dawn until dusk, probing anything and everywhere. They could enter rooms unannounced, listen at windows, hide under floors or inside the roofs, and search or arrest anyone they thought looked suspicious.¹¹

The Verwaltung, or Department IV, was responsible for a variety of camp transactions and affairs. It handled the construction of new barracks, arranged for the repair of furniture, and provided the camp's food supply. This department also took care of the Russian prisoners who worked in Stalag Luft III.

The Lagerfuhrung, or "camp organization" office, otherwise known as Department V, was still under Simoleit's control just as it had been at Barth.¹² Composed of twelve officers and about fifty sergeants and privates by 1944, it was the largest administrative department in the camp. Almost all of its personnel understood and spoke English, which was an important qualification for their work since they were in closer contact with the prisoners than anyone else on the German staff. One of the duties of this department was to maintain a large file of index cards on which was noted the personal history of every prisoner in camp. Two Lagerfuhrung officers were assigned to

¹¹Crawley, Escape, 16.

¹²Simoleit states that the literal translation would be "camp leadership," but that the real and highest leadership post belonged to the Kommandant and that Lagerfuhrung should accordingly be translated as "camp organization."

each compound and were called "Lageroffiziers" or Lager (camp) officers. They had several sergeants who helped them, and together these persons were responsible for much of what happened in the compounds. They spent almost their entire working day inside the compounds and knew most of the prisoners on sight. According to Simoleit, the Lager officers were "ordered to act in good cooperation with the prisoners, to help them as much as possible and to accept their wishes and complaints." "Of course," Simoleit quickly adds, "they also had to care for the execution of all camp orders given by the commandant." One suspects that it is in this latter role and not the former one that most of the prisoners remember the Lager officers and men.

One of the most important duties assigned to Department V was the daily Appell. Simoleit recalls:

We had always great trouble if our final numbers did not correspond with our lists and if only one of our [thousands] of prisoners was missing. Often it took hours, and often a second roll-call was necessary to detect the cause of our trouble. Perhaps one of the Lager officers had only made a mistake in his report, or the prisoners had hindered and deceived him when he was counting "to keep the Germans busy." Perhaps some prisoners had only hidden in the camp to prepare an escape, or they had already left the camp. In this last and worst case we had to inform immediately the police and the military authorities, and hunting for the escapers began first in all neighbouring districts and later all over Germany, in which cases we were always severely blamed that we were not able to guard our prisoners and that we gave them too much freedom in our camp

For me the roll-call with the following examination, calculation, and evaluation was a real nerve-strain every day. I could not relax before I had handed my report to the commandant.

It was also the Lagerfuhrung personnel who had to prepare for and organize burial parties for prisoners who died.

On the brighter side, Department V had the pleasure of helping the prisoners obtain special items that they needed for their education, theater, recreation, and athletic programs as well as unusual items such as manure for their gardens and sometimes (improperly, of course) materials needed in their clandestine activities such as film, cameras, passes, and radio equipment. Department V also arranged for the parole walks that occasionally were taken outside the camp.

Department VI, the Postzensur, censored the mail and books that were sent to or from all Air Force camps. This task had originally been taken care of by the staff at Dulag Luft, where the intent had been to collect information from the mail that might be helpful in interrogating new prisoners. Captain von Massow, the brother of a well-known Luftwaffe general, was in charge of the censoring office at Dulag Luft and remained as its chief when it was transferred to Stalag Luft III in the spring of 1942.¹³ About one hundred censors, mostly women but also some soldiers, examined the prisoners' mail. As much as possible each censor handled the mail of certain individuals so that he might get to know them through their letters. The censors were well prepared to screen all the letters and books written in English, but Simoleit was the only man in camp at times who could censor the mail of the Polish, Czech, and Russian prisoners. He often spent his evenings at this task, and though he found the Polish and Russian letters easy to read, he could go through the Czech mail only with the help of a grammar and a dictionary.

¹³Smith, Mission Escape, 30. Paul Brickhill spells his name "von Masse." Both men agree that he was the brother of a Luftwaffe general but no information could be found to confirm the general's name.

The German medical or Lazarett staff made up the seventh department. Simoleit indicates that there were three German officers assigned to medical duties, but since only two names appear in the camp inspection reports it is probable that one of the three attended to the Germans only. Doctor Keil served as the chief medical supervisor and Doctor Kremer supervised all dental work. Each man was assisted by prisoners, most of whom were fully qualified for the work they undertook in their respective fields.¹⁴

Before leaving the topic of German administration, it might be well to stress the difficult position that most of the staff members occupied. In almost every case, they found themselves trying to serve three masters—the prisoners, their own superiors, and their fellow German citizens. The difficulties at Barth alerted the staff to the fact that any signs of leniency would be interpreted outside the camp as coddling. At Sagan the staff was increasingly pressed and threatened by the issuance of numerous decrees, rigorous "war-laws," and orders from their superiors. According to Simoleit, Goebbels' propaganda campaign against the "air-gangsters" stirred the populace to such a pitch that many of the staff members began to be regarded almost as traitors when they undertook to provide humane and correct treatment for the prisoners.

A measure of how the pressures increased over the months and years can be observed in the funeral services conducted by the Germans. There was a small cemetery for the prisoners outside Sagan, and in the early years of the war the prisoners who died were buried with full

¹⁴The medical staff among the prisoners will be discussed in the next chapter.

military honors. A delegation of German officers and prisoners attended the body to the cemetery, each carrying a wreath of flowers. At the gravesite a squad of German soldiers rendered the customary gun salute, and the German national colors were placed on the grave. After 1943 all such chivalrous customs were forbidden. Hitler gave strict orders that all Air Force prisoners were henceforth to be buried without military honors.

Orders such as this placed the German staff in an embarrassing position, and sometimes they risked a great deal to save face as well as placate the prisoners. In some cases it was a matter of personal honor as well. Simoleit found himself in just such a predicament shortly after Hitler's order on military funerals had been issued. A prisoner who was en route to the camp had tried to escape from the train, was badly injured, and died in the hospital soon after his arrival at Sagan. Simoleit knew that military honors were forbidden but wanted to avoid bitter feelings and protests among the prisoners. He grasped at the chance to save the situation when he discovered evidence among the man's personal papers that he was a member of a ground crew rather than a flier. No sooner had he decided that military honors could be rendered at the funeral than it was learned that the man was a Jew. Even though he knew that burying an Air Force soldier who was a Jew with military honors involved great risks, Simoleit proceeded as planned, making sure that the man's Jewish identity remained a carefully guarded secret. The funeral services were carried out in the old chivalrous way with a Catholic priest administering the last rites, not even he knowing the real facts of the case. It can be assumed that this was only one of many such incidents.

Photo courtesy of U.S. Army Air
Corps and U.S. Air Force Academy
Library

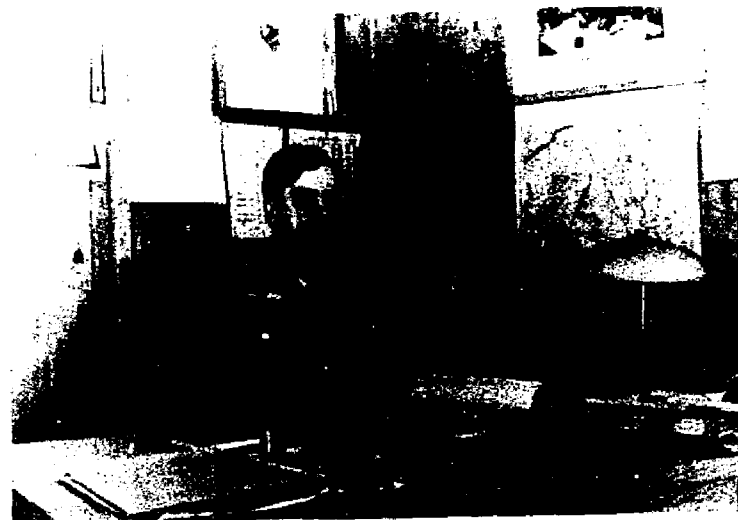


LEFT: OBERGRUPPENFUHRER AND
LIEUTENANT GENERAL-SS
GOTTLÖB BERGER

CENTER TOP: COLONEL FRIEDRICH-
WILHELM VON LINDEINER-WILDAU,
KOMMANDANT

RIGHT TOP: MAJOR GUSTAV SIMOLEIT,
CAMP ADJUTANT

RIGHT BOTTOM: UNTEROFFIZIER
HERMANN GLIMNITZ, "KING OF
THE FERRETS."



Simoleit used his own case aptly to describe the plight of the German staff:

With [these] two sided duties to our own country and to the prisoners, the permanent pressure from both sides, and with the apprehension and anxiety that some catastrophe could occur every day, [our lives were] very unpleasant. From 1940 to 1945 I always suffered from sleeplessness and had to use sleeping pills almost every night.

He concluded, rather dramatically, but nevertheless fairly truthfully:

In discussions about what our future life would be after the war I used to say: 'My future is very clear and simple. Either the Germans will shoot me dead for treason or the Allies will hang me after the war because I was a jailer of prisoners.'

Prisoner Administration

The meager German staff was neither designed for nor capable of administering to all the prisoners' needs. Stalag Luft III attained the size of a small city, and if the prisoners had remained completely idle their standard of living would have been drastically lowered. With the fierce sense of pride usually found in men accustomed to being self-sufficient, the prisoners desperately wanted the Germans to stay out of their business so that they could work out their own solutions to the internal communal problems that confronted them.

It is doubtful if the prisoners saved the Germans many man-hours by doing so much for themselves, since most of the tasks they undertook simply would not have been done if left to the Germans. But the prisoners' efforts helped their captors in other ways. Because the prisoners had their internal affairs well in hand, the camp made a better impression on visitors than would otherwise have been the case. In addition, the broad range of activities the prisoners

undertook helped to keep them occupied and thus reduced the tendency for them to become restless and unruly. But it can be assumed that any help the prisoners gave the Germans was only incidental. It was simply a case where the prisoners had to organize and assume various duties and responsibilities in order to best protect and foster their own interests. The need to do so had become clear to them during the formative years and was reaffirmed on countless occasions during their stay in captivity.

Military customs and traditions served as the heart and core of the prisoners' administrative and organizational system. Although the prisoners often deviated from the regular norms of military life in matters of dress, military courtesies, and personal appearance, the violations stemmed more from the privations of camp life than from any willful desire to deny their military identity and heritage. There were some prisoners who felt that their status as captives placed them beyond the control of their commanding officers, but overall, such men were in a small minority, and most of them agreed to abide by the rules when they learned that the military chain of command did, indeed, function in the camp. The chain of command was based on date of rank and structured by duty title.

The highest ranking officer in the camp was considered the Senior Allied Officer, a position which the Germans recognized until a short time after the prisoners were separated by nationality. Thereafter, the Germans acknowledged one man as the Senior American Officer and allowed him to speak for the prisoners residing in Center, South, and West Compounds. A British Senior Officer, in turn, represented the prisoners in East, North, and Belaria Compounds. Thus, even though

General Vanaman was clearly the ranking man in Stalag Luft III after August 1944, he was not allowed to visit any of the British compounds. When the American compounds became overcrowded in the fall months of 1944 and the new American arrivals had to be housed in Belaria and North Compound, they were represented by Senior American Officers who resided in the respective compounds, but otherwise were considered to be under the control of the Senior British Officer who was ultimately responsible for all the prisoners in the three British compounds.¹⁵

Below the Senior Allied or Senior British and American officers in the chain of command came the senior officers of the various nationalities that served as Compound Commanders. The senior officer of the nationality most widely represented in the compound usually became the Compound Commander, and the senior officers of the other nationalities then served in some capacity on the compound staff or were otherwise consulted in all matters that concerned the prisoners they represented.

The Compound Commanders were the cornerstone of the prisoners' administrative system, and their personalities strongly influenced events and conditions in the compounds. They led by exercising a blend of military authority and careful persuasion. They were expected to maintain discipline and order, but did not have court martial authority in the camp. Colonel Spivey explains how he coped with this delicate situation in Center Compound:

We set out at once to organize the camp into a military unit. All of the Americans were called together and were told of the plans. It was explained that each one was still in

¹⁵Charles G. Goodrich to author, November 21, 1975.

the Army and liable to the Articles of War even though not directly under military control. I assured them I had the authority and would invoke the Articles of War if necessary

The reaction [to] this meeting as a whole was not good The advocates of the iron fist manner of control believed that the only way to get the Americans to band together for their own good was to be positive and ruthless but those of us who were older and more experienced in dealing with men realized this was no place for harshness or unreasonableness We held fast to our decision to run the camp in a military manner, giving orders and demanding they be carried out. Our approach was firm but geared to an understanding of the situation. We determined to lead, guide, direct, and encourage instead of being arbitrary and unreasonable. I do not know what I would have done if a group had steadfastly refused to cooperate.

Although Spivey was never confronted with large scale resistance, there were instances when individuals refused to cooperate. He goes on to explain:

Not all the men were willing to do their part and many believed the authority of the SAO was fictitious and could not be enforced. Some believed they owed no allegiance to the will of the camp as a whole nor did they care to consider what inconvenience the camp suffered as a result of their individual actions. They maintained that their instructions to escape were the only ones they intended to obey These mavericks in our otherwise disciplined herd had to be treated as individuals and if the barracks commander couldn't take care of the situation the man was brought to me; if I couldn't reason with him he became the ward of the strong arm squad of his barracks They weren't adverse to manhandling a boy who wouldn't obey camp orders nor were they beyond taking a lad who wouldn't bathe to the ice-cold shower and scrubbing him with a GI scrubbing brush and Octagon soap. These cases were few and as a general rule I could rely on the men carrying out any order given them.¹⁶

¹⁶Delmar T. Spivey, "History of Center Compound" (unpublished

Colonel Goodrich agreed that discipline was of the greatest importance and sought to instill it in the prisoners in much the same manner as Spivey. Both men and their staffs conducted orientation and indoctrination talks for newly-arrived prisoners, pressured their subordinates to enforce orders and policies pertaining to conduct, and used the Appells to march the men in formation and enforce good order and military behavior. Men late for Appell were required to report early for several days, and some violations were punished by reprimand. In the more serious cases, the incidents were investigated as a prelude to possible court martial action after the war. The results of the investigation were always announced to the compound as a warning to others.¹⁷

Although there was some discontent expressed about the military nature of the camp's organizational structure and some of the rules and regulations that were laid down, most of the men realized the necessity for such things. Thus, although some of the prisoners were shocked to learn that Colonel Spivey planned to hold Saturday morning inspections in Center Compound, most of them nevertheless responded in traditional fashion. They spent long hours the day and night before cleaning their rooms, getting haircuts and shaves, polishing their shoes, and putting together the best pieces of their uniforms in an attempt to appear as military as possible on inspection day. And when

manuscript, 1948), 51-53, Spivey Collection. Hereinafter cited as "History."

¹⁷Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, 2C. No such cases were found in the documentary material. Some of the prisoners interviewed by the author recalled such cases but were understandably reluctant to give any details.

1. COL. WILLIAM T. HENNEY
2. COL. WILLIAM T. HENNEY
3. COL. WILLIAM T. HENNEY



COL. WILLIAM T. HENNEY

MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN STAFF



ERIC CENTRAL ARTHUR N. YAMADA



LT. COL. ALBERT E. CLARK



LT. COL. WILLIAM T. HENNEY
(INTELLIGENCE OFFICE, CLARK)
C. W. H.

COL. WILLIAM T. HENNEY

FIG. 1

the West Point colonel gave his approval to a room and the men who occupied it, they all exhibited a genuine sense of pride in their mutual achievement.¹⁸

The Compound Commanders were assisted by numerous people who served either in functional capacities or directly in the chain of command. The most prominent among those assigned to functional duties were: the personnel assigned as intelligence, security, or operations (escape) officers; those placed in charge of major camp departments such as the mail office, clothing store, Red Cross parcels and personal parcel stores, Y.M.C.A. equipment office, compound kitchen, dispensary, libraries, and camp carpentry, electrician, and tin shops; and those who supervised major camp activities, such as educational programs, publishing ventures, theater and music productions, and sports and religious events. The work carried on by the men who occupied these positions will be discussed in detail in the coming chapters. The individuals who served as part of the chain of command or otherwise were considered part of the Commander's personal staff included one or more interpreters, camp office personnel, an Executive Officer, an Adjutant, and the barracks and room commanders, the latter often being called "room Fuehrers."

The offices and living quarters of the Compound Commander, the Executive Officer, and the Adjutant served as the nerve center of daily camp life. These men carried on all official relations with the Germans, the Protecting Power, the Y.M.C.A. and Red Cross

¹⁸Thomas E. Mulligan, Lyman B. Burbank, and Robert R. Brunn, "History of Center Compound, Stalag Luft III, Sagan Germany" (unpublished manuscript, 1945), Part I, Section 1a [Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Maxwell AFB, Alabama]. Hereinafter cited as "History of Center Compound."

representatives, and the other compounds. Prisoners came to these offices to make requests for supplies, register complaints, obtain clarifications on policies, arrange schedules, and obtain help on personal problems. Domestic worries were the subject of many conversations. One prisoner complained because he had left his car and power-of-attorney with his girl only to find that she had married someone else and that the happy couple were using his car and spending his money. Letters from home, or the absence of them, often motivated prisoners to seek conversations with "the old man" to whom they would pour out their feelings, doubts, suspicions, and fears. Many prisoners had business matters pertaining to their personal finances which required power-of-attorney papers to be drawn up or other official correspondence which had to be processed by the clerical staff. In addition to the normal clerical work done in the camp offices, there were unending requests for use of the office equipment to type news articles for the Newsroom, compound newspapers, translations of German communiques, scripts of plays for the theater, and parcel and property lists.¹⁹

The Barracks or "Block" Commanders served as yet another link in the chain of command. The prisoners considered a block to be the equivalent of a squadron in a regular installation and organized it in much the same way. Each block had a commander and, as usual, the entire block benefited or suffered in accordance with his abilities and efforts. One source goes so far as to state that it became apparent to the prisoners that "the Block Commander's job was the keystone

¹⁹Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3A(1).

for the effectiveness of the whole compound organization."²⁰ This point could be argued, especially considering the importance of the Compound Commander's role, but the statement serves to highlight the extent to which the prisoners relied upon their designated leaders. Much of the Block Commander's time was taken up in supervising his people in such matters as talking to the Germans without permission, maintaining good order at Appells, ensuring that basic sanitation practices were observed in the barracks, and restricting the liberties of the individual for the good of all. His was a demanding job and persons suited to it were not easily found. Some officers with good operational records did not necessarily make good Block Commanders. Overall, however, the prisoners expressed general satisfaction with the men placed in charge of the blocks, and in many cases the Block Commanders earned reputations for attaining efficiency and cooperation in ways that impressed both the men and the senior officers.²¹

Each block possessed staff members that largely duplicated the compound staff. Thus the Compound Sports Officer was assisted by a Sports Officer in each of the blocks, as were the Kitchen Officer, Education Officer, Operations (escape) Officer, Theater Officer and the like.

The lowest level in the echelon of command was the individual room. In Center Compound the large rooms were divided into six

²⁰Ibid., Part I, Section 2C.

²¹Spivey, "History," 52-53; Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 2C.

"Combines" with beds and lockers serving as room and aisle dividers, and each one of these was considered the equivalent of a room. The senior man in each room was the Room Fuehrer, and on a smaller scale his duties paralleled those of the Block Commander. Each room worked out in a more or less democratic fashion the many details that have to be considered when men live together in close quarters, but the Room Commander often cast the deciding vote. In addition, he served as a major communication link. When something of major importance had to be communicated to the prisoners but could not be announced at Appell or at an assembly in the theater, the Compound Commander would give out the news to the Block Commanders, and they, in turn, would tell the Room Commanders who then repeated the messages to the prisoners in their rooms. In short order important matters which could have been badly distorted if left to the rumor factory were carefully cleared up. And when need be, the system worked well enough to prevent the Germans from learning anything that was not meant for their ears.

There may have been other ways for the prisoners to organize their community, but it is doubtful if any of them would have suited their purposes nearly so well as the military chain of command and functional organization which they developed and upon which they relied. To the present-day observer the system might seem cumbersome and unnecessarily heavy-handed in terms of everyone being accountable to someone higher in authority. In defense of their system, however, it may be said that the manner in which the camp was organized answered some very basic needs. It enabled the commanding officers to direct and control the men in each compound in a way that everyone

understood, since all the prisoners had been subjected to military life prior to being captured. At the same time, the organizational structure they adopted provided reliable channels through which the prisoners could express their opinions and have a voice in camp affairs. And the broad base of involvement helped a large proportion of the prisoner population to be constructively occupied. Finally, the system admirably complemented the German administrative system and made it possible for the prisoners to look after their own interests with good prospects for success in instances where the German system proved inadequate or unsuited to the prisoners' needs.

CHAPTER VIII

FROM DAY TO DAY

Introduction

When the German and prisoner administrative systems worked in tandem the prisoners obtained their daily bread without much difficulty. The captives and their captors, however, still represented opposing sides in a bitter war, and it would have been too much to expect continued cooperation in everything affecting the vital interests of either the prisoners or the Germans. The Germans often ignored the prisoners' urgent needs in order to devote more of their resources to the war. At times they also fell victim to their own propaganda concerning the terrible and vicious Luftgangsters, and overreacted with reprisals of unwarranted severity to relatively minor infractions of the rules by the prisoners. At the same time, the prisoners persisted to the end in their efforts to escape and to "keep the Germans busy." They understood the possible penalties that could be levied against them if they were caught in their forbidden acts and were willing to accept them as long as they were not too severe. But they would not accept unnecessary privations and looked to their organizational structure and sense of identity as a community to help fill the voids or overcome any unreasonableness in the German administrative system. In the final analysis, they fully grasped the importance of helping themselves and proceeded to do so

from day to day in order to achieve the best possible living conditions and the most meaningful approach to life that circumstances permitted.

Introduction to Camp Life

The routine of life in Stalag Luft III began the moment the prisoners passed through the gate into the Vorlager. The Germans, accustomed to receiving new purges almost daily, soon came to view each new group as being no different than the dozens of others that had entered this particular camp and proceeded to process them according to a definite routine. First, the prisoners were counted and thoroughly searched. Then, since virtually every one of them was an "important prisoner,"¹ each man had to be photographed, fingerprinted, and given a prisoner of war number. The prisoners were tired, unshaven, and dirty after their long train ride to the camp, and the pictures portrayed some pretty grisly looking characters, just the kind of image the Germans found useful for depicting in the newspapers and posterboards the nature of the "terror fliers" or "Chicago types" that were ravaging the countryside. In sequence, the men were then stripped of any flying clothes they might still have in their possession, were allowed quick showers, and were deloused. Finally, they were issued their bedding which consisted of two blankets,² one

¹Every Army and Navy officer prisoner of the rank of Colonel or above, and every British or American flier, no matter what rank, was classified as an "important prisoner." Brickhill, The Great Escape, with an Introduction by George Harsh, A Fawcett Crest Book (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1950), 72.

²Most prisoners were later given one additional Red Cross blanket.

sheet, one mattress cover that served to hold the wood shavings for the mattress and as a bottom sheet, one pillowcase, one pillow filled with straw, and one small face towel. In addition, they were usually given one two-quart heavy mixing bowl, one cup, a knife, a fork, and a spoon. They were admonished that these items would not be replaced if lost or broken, and were then sent into one of the compounds.³

The old and new prisoners quickly looked each other over in the hope of seeing the face of an old friend. Spivey states that before the officers in Center Compound became organized in the fall of 1943, those prisoners who recognized one of the new men quickly showed him around the camp and helped him get settled, which aided him in adjusting to life in captivity. However, those who were not recognized by the old prisoners were left to shift for themselves. Understandably, it took some of these less fortunate men two or three months to learn what was expected of them and how they might help themselves. By October this haphazard reception for the new prisoners was replaced by a highly organized system which benefited both the old and the new men.

The new system provided for the orderly processing of the prisoners in a way that left little to chance. They were segregated from the old prisoners upon arrival in the compound and taken to the compound theater where they were briefed by the camp staff on what

³Delmar T. Spivey, "History of Center Compound" (unpublished manuscript, 1946), 37-38, Spivey Collection [Special Collections Room, USAF Academy Library, Colorado]. Hereinafter cited as "History." Different prisoners have noted variations in the above routine and property issue, but this account can be considered fairly representative of what the prisoners encountered in the Vorlager during their first day in camp.

would happen to them in the coming hours. One historical novel written by a former prisoner of Stalag Luft III presents a vivid picture of what transpired in the theater:

When we were seated inside, a tall American colonel stepped through the front door, and the major called us to attention. He executed a snappy salute and the colonel returned it as he climbed the steps leading to the stage. Our group remained silently at attention

'At ease,' he commanded in a dignified manner.

'I am Colonel _____, Commanding Officer of _____ Compound. The next few days will be somewhat confusing for you new men. That has been the case with me and every older man who came through those prison gates before you. Being prisoners, we are forced through circumstances to do things we had never dreamed or conceived of doing before. We are called upon every single day to sacrifice, endure, and work together in the common struggle for our survival.

After explaining in broad terms how the compound was organized, the colonel is said to have emphasized:

'We have learned that through organization we live better, eat better, and get along better, and in general, life is much more bearable for all of us.

Pausing at this point and looking toward some old prisoners present in the theater, he continued:

'I call upon you to do your job to the best of your ability, and to do it good-naturedly. Listen to the older men for they can help you. Treat them with respect for they have earned it. Some of the older prisoners may bite your head off. I ask you to try to hold your temper. Some of these men have been prisoners at Sagan for over twenty months. Their nerves are strained; they are sometimes easily antagonized, and you must try to understand. You will find that the older prisoners have gained judgement and wisdom.

'Brotherhood, kindness, and understanding will take you a long way while you are here. Don't be a slacker, for you will find yourself

without a single friend. Life will be only as pleasant as you make it yourself.

Noting another pause in the colonel's briefing, the author continues in the colonel's words:

'We do not know who you are. We know that we have one hundred twenty-one men before us who are supposed to be Americans. We intend to make sure you are—to the last man

'You are probably Americans to the last man, but we have had German stooges in these groups before who speak perfect English and have every characteristic of being American. There are many things which the Germans would like to know. These men live among us as spies for the Germans. We have eliminated them to the last man. We do not intend to allow another stooge in this camp.

'This identification will take only a few hours, but until you have been identified as an American, the old prisoners will not speak to you. You will be asked many questions, and you may be placed on exhibition so that someone can identify you. You must be identified by our Intelligence before any of us can accept you. The sooner this is over, the better We will have these talks from time to time.

After the colonel departed a member of the intelligence staff continued:

'I am going to send you to the library for interviews with my staff. When each of you is identified you will be assigned to your barracks. If we have not identified you by noon you will remain in the library for the noon meal. We will feed all of you the meal; but starting tonight you will eat in your combine, unless you still have not been identified. If we have not identified you by five o'clock, you will be assigned to a special isolation ward until you are cleared with Intelligence

'Just one more thing. The next two or three days, I will be sending men from our Intelligence to interview you. They will ask you questions about the war, its progress, your duties in the Air Force, news about the

U.S., Dulag Luft, your trip here, and many other questions. You will answer any question they ask you, for this is a part of our system of information.

The novelist and the other prisoners were then taken to the library, where questions and answers of the following nature were heard:

'Where are you from?'
 'Texas.'
 'What part of Texas?'
 'Dallas.'
 'What was your last street address in Dallas?'
 '714 South Winnetka in Oak Cliff.'
 'What is Oak Cliff?'
 'It is a part of Dallas.'
 'What high school did you attend?'
 'Sunset High.'

A man left the room at this point and soon returned with another old prisoner who was himself from Dallas. He picked up the questioning:

'Did you go to college?'
 'Yes.'
 'Where?'
 'The University of Texas.'
 'Texas University is in Dallas, I believe you said.'
 'No, I said I lived in Dallas. The University is in Austin.'
 'On what street is Sunset High School located?'
 'Jefferson Avenue.'
 'What street has all of the downtown theaters?'
 'Main Street.'
 'What are the two main hotels in Dallas?'
 'The Adolphus and Baker.'
 'Who is Dallas County's present Congressman?'
 'Wilson.'

The questions and answers went on until the Intelligence staff was satisfied that the prisoner was indeed who he said he was. The narrative goes on to emphasize the extent to which every detail concerning their arrival had been taken care of in advance:

'O.K. Ken, you are now one of us You are assigned to block seven located in the east end of barracks 152 Welcome aboard and report to Lieutenant Ferrell. He is [the] assistant block commander. He will

take it from there.

When I walked out the front door, a runner asked me my name and block, and I followed him across the parade grounds. We entered the east end of barracks number 152. Lieutenant Ferrell was waiting in the first room.⁴

Undoubtedly not every new prisoner was processed into the camp as smoothly as the one Simmons portrays, but it is certain that the system worked well in the vast majority of cases. The prisoners were able to boast that after a compound had been fully organized, prisoners were adjusting as well in three or four days as they did under the old system in a month or two.⁵

Food

One of the first things to which the new prisoners were exposed was the daily routine of collecting, preparing, and sharing of their limited food supply. One prisoner expressed the sentiments of virtually every prisoner in camp when he observed that "German rations were just enough to insure starvation in its most prolonged and unpleasant form."⁶ The Allied doctors in camp agreed with them. Noting that a grown man who maintains a fairly active life should be nourished by about 3,000 calories a day, they asserted that the German ration of 1,500 to 1,900 calories a day clearly was inadequate.

⁴Kenneth W. Simmons, Kriegle (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1960), 91-96.

⁵Thomas E. Mulligan, Lyman B. Burbank, and Robert R. Brunn, "History of Center Compound, Stalag Luft III, Sagan Germany" (unpublished manuscript, 1945), Part I, Section 1a [Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Maxwell AFB, Alabama]. Hereinafter cited as "History of Center Compound."

⁶Brickhill, The Great Escape, 192.

Although the amount and quality of the food varied from time to time and deteriorated near the end of the war, a fairly accurate impression of the deficiencies in the German ration can be obtained from the data given below.

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>AMOUNT ALLOTTED IN OCTOBER 1944</u>	<u>AMOUNT NECESSARY</u>	<u>DEFICIENCY</u>
Calories	1,900	3,000	1,100
Fats	35	100	55
Protein	45	100	55
Carbohydrates	340	400	60
Vitamin A	2,500	5,000	2,500
Vitamin B-1	240	600	350
Vitamin C	1,300	1,500	200 ⁷

The shortages of food often were quite serious. Theoretically, the prisoners were supposed to be receiving the same rations as the German troops. That being the case, the meat given them should have contained no more than an average of twenty-five per cent bone. In reality, it often contained as much as forty to fifty per cent bone. Vegetables were often scarce or nonexistent. The Germans used potatoes as one of the main staples in the prisoners' diet but often provided spoiled potatoes or none at all, as was the case in the fall of 1943 when eastern Germany experienced a potato famine. Seldom were suitable substitutes available. The kohlrube distributed in the place

⁷Protecting Power Report No. 1 concerning a visit made on December 9, 1942, by Dr. Kurt Schaeffeler of the Swiss Legation at Berlin. "Stalag Luft III" Folder, "Camp Reports-Germany-Stalag Luft" File [American POW Information Bureau, Office of the Provost Marshal General], Record Group 389 [Modern Military Branch, National Archives]. The data given in the above chart was compiled by the American and British doctors in Stalag Luft III and given to Dr. Rossel and Dr. Thudichum, International Red Cross representatives who visited the camp on November 24-25, 1944. See "Stalag Luft III" Folder, "Camp Reports-Germany-Stalag Luft" File [American POW Information Bureau, Office of the Provost Marshall General], Record Group 389 [Modern Military Branch, National Archives].

of potatoes was a coarse Swedish turnip that many prisoners could not stomach. On at least one occasion, the prisoners went for several months without any green vegetables.⁸

It would have been little comfort to the prisoners if they had known that the German troops were not eating any better than they. But in all fairness to the German camp staff, it should be pointed out that, while the prisoners were getting an average of 300 grams of bread per day, Simoleit and the other German officers were receiving only 180 grams. For a long period of time, he reports, the German officers were getting less to eat than the privates; in addition to the 180 grams of bread, the German camp officers were allotted only a tiny piece of butter, cheese or sausage, and a plate of thin vegetable soup for dinner. Only after they had lost a great deal of weight did the Kommandant send a sharp protest to higher authorities, and then the officers were given permission to eat the better food and higher rations of the privates. He does not state how this inequity came about in the first place or what the privates were given to eat.⁹ But it appears that at least the general populace in Germany, if not the German soldiers, probably ate less than the prisoners,

⁸Protecting Power Report No. 5 concerning a visit made on February 22-24, 1944, by Mr. Gabriel Naville, representative of the Swiss Legation at Berlin, File No. 711.62114 A.I.R./137 ["Reports of Inspection of Camps for American Prisoners in Germany"], Record Group 59 [Diplomatic Branch, National Archives]; Report of visit made on May 22, 1944, by Dr. Rossel and Mr. Paul Wyss, representatives of the International Red Cross, "Stalag Luft III" Folder, "Camp Reports-Germany-Stalag Luft" File, Record Group 389.

⁹Gustav Simoleit, "Organization and Administration of the Prisoner of War Camp No. III of the Air Force," unpublished manuscript, enclosed in Simoleit to Delmar T. Spivey, December 19, 1968, Spivey Collection. Hereinafter cited as "Organization and Administration."

especially near the end of the war.

One staple that the prisoners did receive on a regular basis was bread. One prisoner recalls:

Bread, which was issued several times a week, was the most essential and sought-after item. The average prisoner had to cultivate a taste for this heavy, black loaf, as it was a repulsive, soggy mixture of questionable ingredients with a definite sour taste. I can recall my incredulity on the evening of capture when I was given several slabs of this bread to eat with some cheese and bologna. At first I couldn't believe that I was expected to eat it. After several months had elapsed I had overcome my distaste for it and at the end of a year had almost developed a liking for this German Army ration. The sogginess and sour taste could be counteracted to a certain degree by toasting, which was done on the tiny room stoves when fuel was available. Conveying the five-pound loaves from the cook-house to barracks was accomplished by placing thirty or forty, the ration for the barracks, on a door from a food locker or an upturned bench. Two men then laboriously carried it on their shoulders. At Sagan, the bread ration approximated a loaf per person per week.¹⁰

Other items that were issued fairly regularly included: a dish of cooked hot pea or barley soup every other day at noon; an occasional cooked millet; cooked potatoes nearly every day in fair quantities (on occasion distributed uncooked); some sugar, margarine, jam, cheese, fresh meat; token amounts of fresh vegetables, such as cucumbers, lettuce, and kohlrube; and German blood sausage which was never popular in camp since it consisted of nothing more than congealed

¹⁰Bob Neary, Stalag Luft III: Sagan...Nuernberg...Moosburg, A Collection of German Prison Camp Sketches with Descriptive Text Based on Personal Experiences (North Wales, Pa.; by author, 1946), 14. Hereinafter cited as Stalag Luft III: Sagan.

blood with a few slices of onion added.¹¹

The prisoners considered themselves fortunate to have access to food other than just the German ration. The most important source was the Red Cross food parcels. Although some camps did not receive these parcels regularly or in sufficient quantities, Stalag Luft III almost always carried an ample inventory of either Canadian, British, or American Red Cross parcels to supply each prisoner with about one parcel a week. The contents varied, but a typical parcel contained the items depicted in Figure 8. When issued at the rate of one per man each week, the parcels added about one thousand calories per day to the prisoners' diet. Thus the prisoners could not have survived for extended periods of time on either the German or Red Cross foods, but when the rations from the two sources were combined the prisoners had an adequate, though by no means tasty, diet.¹²

During and after the war the vast majority of prisoners that lived in Stalag Luft III gave endless praise to the Red Cross for the life-saving food and other items it provided. Some prisoners were quite ignorant of where some of the food they ate came from: when special Christmas food parcels were sent in 1943, they wrote home

¹¹Ibid.

¹²British Embassy in Washington to Mr. George S. Brandt, Department of State, Washington, March 13, 1943, File No. 740.00114 EW/3316 3/13 ["Prisoners of War-European War, 1939"], Record Group 59 [Diplomatic Branch, National Archives]. For a brief but excellent discussion of the Red Cross program for prisoners of war see Foster Rhea Dulles, The American Red Cross: A History (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), 489-506. A more comprehensive account is given in Arthur W. Robinson, "Relief to Prisoners of War in World War II" (unpublished historical monograph, 1950), Vol. XXII, "The History of the American Red Cross."

Photo courtesy American National
Red Cross



FOOD FOR WAR PRISONERS—CONTENTS OF PARCEL PACKED BY AMERICAN RED CROSS VOLUNTEERS.

No. 7-4

CONTENTS OF RED CROSS
FOOD PARCEL

FIGURE 8

telling how the Germans had been extra generous in their food issue for Christmas. But most of the men knew the food was paid for by their governments and assembled, packaged, and shipped by the respective National Red Cross units through International Red Cross channels, and they expressed their gratitude for the tremendous effort put forth by Red Cross workers.

Serious difficulties were encountered in shipping parcels for prisoners. The American Red Cross was unable to make its contribution widely felt until late 1943 because shipping space could not be obtained to transport the rapidly accumulating stocks. Reflecting the misunderstandings that sometimes occurred as a result of transportation problems, a prisoner in an unidentified camp in Germany wrote home on May 23, 1943:

The American Red Cross isn't coming thru with the boxes. It's funny the British and Canadian Red Cross can get anything thru to the prisoners, but the Americans can't. So far, we have had three times as many boxes from the British and Canadians as we have from Americans.

And again on July 10 he reported:

Most of the fellows are wearing British Army uniforms, so you can figure for yourself how much help we are receiving. Don't let those grafting pigs hand you a line.¹³

Records indicate that American Red Cross officials spared no effort in trying to obtain shipping space for the quantities of goods they had ready for the prisoners. British and Canadian goods were getting through simply because those countries had already established

¹³Stella M. Mills to Senator H. Lodge, October 29, 1943, File No. 711.62114A/155 ["United States Prisoners of War Detained by Germany"], Record Group 59 [Diplomatic Branch, National Archives].

reliable channels for delivering the parcels. By mid-1943 the Americans succeeded in working out the necessary details for getting the parcels to Europe, but within less than a year the problem of getting the food from the coast to the camps in Germany in turn became acute. The breakdown of rail communications between Marseilles and Switzerland, first because of partisan activity and then because of the invasions of France, prevented the movement of supplies by that route from late May 1944 onwards, and it took about eight months to open up new routes through Sweden. When a northern route was found, thirty ships made the round trip from Sweden to Germany. An interesting fact about the new route that speaks well for the Germans is that, while the Allies were daily sowing the Baltic Sea with mines, the Germans were providing minesweepers for every one of the Red Cross ships. One report asserts that there must have been several German minesweepers performing just this one operation for about six months.¹⁴ Because of the breakdown in the southern route through France, however, few new parcels were put ashore in Europe from May through December 1944, and from September 4, 1944 until January 17, 1945 the prisoners in Stalag Luft III received only "half-rations," or one-half parcel per man per week.¹⁵

¹⁴Interview with Maurice Pate, Director of Prisoner of War Relief, American Red Cross, by Marshall Smelser, February 14, 1946 and quoted in Robinson, Relief to Prisoners, 79. For a fuller discussion of the efforts made by the American Red Cross to secure transportation for the shipment of parcels, see Robinson, Relief to Prisoners, 95-116, and Cordell Hull, Secretary of State to U.S. Embassy, London, September 30, 1944, File No. 740.00114EW/9-3044, Record Group 59.

¹⁵Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part III (Diary), September 4, 1944 and January 17, 1945.

Ever since the early years of the war, the Germans had faithfully punctured the tins of Red Cross food given to the prisoners so that they could not be used as escape rations, but the prisoners found that they could still keep the meat several days until the tin began to turn blue.¹⁶ In addition, the men were allowed to save other food items from Red Cross issues until they had accumulated sufficient quantities of each one to prepare special dishes. For reasons which will be made clear later, the prisoners had to eat in small groups rather than individually, and only by saving food could they prepare a group mess. They were, therefore, alarmed to hear about a new German order that came out in September 1944 directing that all Red Cross parcels be opened and the tins punctured immediately upon arrival in camp. If fully observed, this practice would have threatened the prisoners in several ways. Most importantly, it would have meant that no more parcels would be stockpiled in the camp. This posed an especially serious threat in view of the increasing transportation difficulties in Germany. And, if only a one-day ration could be held on hand, it would henceforth be impossible for the prisoners to cook their own food, since it would obviously have to be reduced to bulk issues and cooked in the kitchens. There was no other way to distribute the Red Cross parcels which were designed for consumption by individuals over a one-week period.

The Red Cross vigorously protested the order and pointed out

¹⁶Interview with Albert P. Clark, November 7, 1975. The color change in the tin indicated that the meat was about to spoil and had already undergone some chemical change which affected the tin.

that, even though the distribution of Red Cross parcels could not be regarded as a right under the Geneva Convention, agreements had been reached between the belligerents in Europe calling for their distribution, and these agreements included a de facto right to store reserves in or near the camps. The Germans argued in support of their announced intention that they merely wanted to keep large quantities of tinned goods from falling into the hands of partisan groups. One unidentified Allied source interpreted this statement as a sign that the Germans were becoming increasingly afraid that the millions of prisoners held captive in Germany would be armed by weapons dropped from the air or released by Allied paratroops and would become a potent force in the rear of the German armies, a thought reminiscent of those expressed at the time General Vanaman appeared in camp only a few weeks prior.¹⁷

The prisoners were already apprehensive about the impending food crisis when yet another incident occurred to threaten their enjoyment of the Red Cross food. One day in early October, a Luftgau

¹⁷Unless otherwise noted, the information pertaining to the Red Cross food reserves was extracted from "Copy of memorandum prepared in the Department of State regarding the German prohibition against the accumulation of reserves of food parcels at prisoner of war camps in Germany," January 22, 1945, File No. 619.2/43 ["Food and Subsistence, American and Allied Internees and POW"], Archives Division [National Headquarters], American Red Cross [Washington, D.C.], and "Minutes of the 40th Meeting of Sub-Committee B of the Imperial Prisoners of War Committee," December 21, 1944, File No. 740.00114 EW/1-2045, Record Group 59. The comment by the unidentified Allied source is included in a two page summary of Red Cross activities carrying the title "Prisoners of War in World War II." The document is filed under the heading "Red Cross, U.S., ANRC, Prisoners of War Activities (Miscellaneous-European)," located in the Archives Division, American Red Cross, Washington, D.C.

inspector toured the Escape Museum that had been set up in the Kaommandantur by the German staff to help train ferrets and impress visitors with the skillful job they were doing in confiscating the prisoners' escape equipment. The inspector noted that the majority of the escape aids¹⁸ had been made out of tin taken from the Klim (milk spelled backwards) powdered milk cans that came in the Red Cross parcels. He dug up an old 1940 regulation that prohibited the retention of tins of any kind in the compounds and insisted that it be implemented immediately. The Kommandant amended the order to allow each prisoner to keep six cans so that he might keep his various food items separate, but otherwise required that by noon on October 5 all the tins in camp be turned in at the gate. The order was given on October 4, and the prisoners complied on schedule. This act represented a serious loss to the prisoners. In addition to using the tins for making escape aids, the prisoners had also fabricated out of them such cooking and eating utensils as coffeepots, baking pans, egg beaters, and a host of other items that were needed but not provided by the Germans. When several other inspectors arrived a short time later, General Vanaman showed them some of the tinware made by the prisoners, and they were sufficiently impressed to ask for samples to take to higher headquarters in a bid to have some of the tins restored. But the order stood, and thereafter the prisoners had to return the tins from one Red Cross parcel before they could receive another issue.¹⁹

¹⁸The escape aids are described in Chapter XII.

¹⁹Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part I, Section 1h, Part III (Diary), October 4, 7, 1944.

In the meantime, the prisoners' attention was drawn back to the more serious problem of the one-day food supply order. It appears that the original German order was not as severe as originally thought, since it permitted some discretion on the part of the individual camp kommandants, allowing them to retain a two-month supply of food as long as the reserves were stored outside the camp under special lock and key. At Sagan this had always been done anyway, so there was no visible change in the system. The parcels were controlled from the Red Cross parcel store in East Vorlager and sent from there as needed to the Vorlagers of West Compound, Belaria, and the North Camp Infirmary. When these facilities were filled, additional stocks were kept in a nearby granary.²⁰ But the problem remained concerning the one-day supply of food inside the camp. The prisoners were told that after November 20 the Abwehr would confiscate any extra food in the camp. As suggested earlier, this meant that henceforth all food in Red Cross and personal parcels would be emptied into large containers and delivered to the cookhouse where it would be cooked and then distributed to the prisoners.²¹ The problems this would pose had already been spelled out for the German staff by Colonel Spivey when the question of issuing Red Cross food in bulk had come up the previous March. He had noted then that the idea was highly impractical

²⁰Report of visit made on November 24-25, 1944 by Dr. Rossel and Dr. Thudichum, delegates of the International Red Cross, "Stalag Luft III" Folder, "Camp Reports-Germany-Stalag Luft" File, Record Group 389; Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part III (Diary), January 1, 1945. The granary appears in the background as the only building rising above the treeline in photographs of the camp (see Figure 5).

²¹Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part III (Diary), November 16, 1944,

since the parcels were designed for consumption over a one-week period, that the food would spoil if emptied into large containers, and that the cookhouses were not equipped to handle the cooking for the entire camp. He concluded with the telling statement:

The preparing of food in barracks has been the greatest single thing to bring contentment and happiness to the prisoners of war. It occupies one fourth of all prisoners of war time during each day and affords much pleasure in enjoying better food.²²

The prisoners had won their case in March, and after the November order became known, General Vanaman wrote a persuasive letter to the Kommandant protesting the most recent attempt to interfere with the prisoners' use of Red Cross food. He noted, among other things, that the order would remove not only Red Cross food but also food which the prisoners had received from home, and that such food, though unimportant in terms of quantity, was of great value to the prisoners because it introduced variety into their diet and because it assumed "significance [of] huge proportions in the mind of a prisoner of war because it [came] from his wife and mother." He also reminded the Germans that it took four or five days to assemble enough food of certain varieties to prepare a satisfactory meal. If the order were carried out, the entire system of preparing meals would at once disappear. Furthermore, he argued, every ounce of the prisoners' meager food savings would be used during "the two approaching great National Holidays, our Harvest Thanksgiving Day and Christmas; both of which are celebrated by nearly every civilized nation." He

²²Delmar T. Spivey to the Camp Commandant, Stalag Luft III, March 27, 1944; Ibid., Part I, Section 1h.

concluded by saying that it would be considered an injustice by every prisoner of war in the camp if these traditional holidays could not be appropriately remembered by utilizing the food which they had saved for this purpose.²³ It is not known what effect Vanaman's letter had on the Germans, but it is known that they never instituted the one-day supply order in Stalag Luft III.²⁴

The prisoners did have several other sources of food that allowed them to vary their diet somewhat. Although the soil was too sandy to sustain good growth, most of the prisoners planted and cultivated vegetable gardens. They obtained seeds from the Red Cross and some animal manure for fertilizer, but the latter was never available in sufficient quantities to be of much help. The more avid gardeners could often be seen following the horses hitched to the Honeywagon that emptied the pit-latrines. The gardens never produced much, but the more diligent gardeners did harvest a few vegetables, including items like onions, that were highly sought after to season the bland food in the prison diet.²⁵

Another source of food was the next-of-kin or personal parcels already mentioned. These could be sent by relatives every two months

²³Arthur W. Vanaman to O.K.W. through Commandant, Stalag Luft III, November 20, 1944; Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part I, Section 1h; Charles G. Goodrich, "History of the USAAF, Prisoners of the South Compound, Stalag Luft III" (unpublished manuscript, 1945), Part I, Section 3A(2) [Alfred F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Maxwell AFB, Alabama]. Hereinafter cited as "History of South Compound."

postage free and ranged up to eleven pounds in weight. The contents varied, but the most commonly recommended items were cigarettes, crackers, canned fish and meat, bouillion cubes for broth, chocolate, cheese, condensed milk, and dried fruits and vegetables. Like the Red Cross parcels, the food items in the personal parcels were usually shared equally by everyone in a room. Their primary value was that they enabled the prisoners to prepare more special dishes and at the same time be reminded of their ties with home.²⁶

An additional source to which prisoners could turn for food was an institution in the camp which became known as Foodaco. Another product of the formative years, Foodaco (originally spelled Food Acco and standing for "food account") was a Canadian institution that originated at Warburg. Though run with utmost integrity, the two individuals who set up Foodaco realized a sizeable profit. At Stalag Luft III Wings Day "nationalized" the business and sent the profits to the kitchen and the messes after a certain amount of the food, cigarettes, and other valuable items traded there were set aside for bribing the Germans. Foodaco was essentially a food trading center where men who had a surplus of one type of food could trade on a point value system for other types of food. It soon became the

²⁶For a complete list of items that could be sent by next-of-kin, as well as the detailed instructions that had to be observed in mailing the parcels, see James L. Fieser, Vice Chairman, American Red Cross to Chapter Chairman, July 30, 1940 and "Next-of-Kin Prisoner of War Parcels," File No. 619.2/43, Archives Division, American Red Cross; Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part I, Section 1.

center of legitimate camp trading for cigarettes, pipes, cigars, and tobacco.²⁷

The final source of food was the canteen. Food items for the canteen that were purchased in bulk from the Germans whenever they could be obtained included vinegar, mustard, pickled vegetables, and, on rare occasions, an unpalatable beer from which all alcohol had been removed. Reportedly the brew was so bad that even the liquor-starved prisoners could not stomach more than a cup or so at one time.²⁸

The prisoners put as much effort into preparing the food as they did into obtaining it. The personnel in the compound kitchens handled primarily the German rations and either cooked them in large vats and ovens or distributed them among the prisoners. The kitchens offered very few pieces of equipment for such a large task. In South Compound, for example, the kitchen equipment consisted of ten boilers, two ovens, three cooking pots, fourteen milk cans and fourteen pails (for distributing soup to each of the barracks), four ladles, and five wooden pails for washing potatoes. Since this equipment was entirely inadequate for anything approaching a camp mess, almost all the food received in personal and Red Cross parcels, and some of the German rations, were prepared by the prisoners in the barracks. The vats in the kitchens were used mostly to supply hot water for coffee

²⁷For a fuller account of Foodaco, especially as it was set up and operated in Center Compound," see Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part I, Section 1h; Syndey Smith, Mission Escape (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1968), 83.

²⁸Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3A(2).

and other "brews" and for washing. Each room could obtain two jugs of hot water each morning, one at noon, and two each afternoon. However, soup made of potatoes, barley, dried vegetables and meat stock was cooked in the kitchens four times a week and issued at the noonday meals. Ground meat was also partially baked in the kitchen ovens before being issued to the blocks.

Within the blocks, the men in each room ran their own mess. The kitchen stoves inside the blocks were woefully inadequate. They offered a heating surface of about three square feet and an oven which could hold two flat pans at a time. Since every room in the block had to rely on the same stove, the cooking times were rotated. The cook for the day from each room had to prepare an entire meal for twelve to sixteen men in about one-half hour. Two rooms shared the stove at one time, and in order to allow everyone time on the stove some rooms had to eat their evening meal as early as two-thirty in the afternoon while others ate at the fashionably late hour of eight o'clock in the evening.

The prisoners had to rely mostly on handmade cooking and eating utensils. The Germans claimed that the prisoners willfully destroyed the utensils issued them and refused to replace lost or broken items. The prisoners do admit that many eating utensils were damaged or lost in tunneling and gardening work, but it is also true that the German issue was not adequate. The men had to make special baking pans, egg beaters, grinders, scrapers, pots, and coffee percolators out of tin. Every compound had its own tinsmiths who mastered the art of making water-tight containers. A surprising amount of effort went into the

construction of timesaving devices, such as grinders and crushers.²⁹

Chef duty was usually decided by rotation unless someone was a particularly bad cook in which case the less adept individual "hired" a better cook for him and offered to do some other chores in his place. The cook's job was difficult primarily because of the limited time available on the stoves. The communal spirit frequently broke down in the kitchen, and if a cook did not finish in his allotted time, the next man on the schedule often removed the uncooked food from the top of the stove and put his own pots and pans in their place. The unfortunate victim might then spend an hour or more simply scrounging space in which to heat a pot of water. But any cook that was skillful at camouflaging the daily cuisine and making something new out of what was always essentially old usually found the trials at the stove a small price to pay for the hearty appreciation and thanks he received from his roommates. Virtually every prisoner learned about home economics, and new recipes were constantly invented and passed around. The prisoners usually adopted standard names for their makeshift concoctions. A few of the more popular ones were:

Grape-nuts: German bread crumbs roasted in the oven, served as a cereal.

Noodles or macaroni: Canadian hardtack soaked in water and heated, with cheese, diced spam and seasoning.

Lemon custard pie: Condensed milk, klm, and lemon powder, whipped until smooth.

²⁹Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3A (2); Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part I, Section 1h; R. W. Kimball and O. M. Chiesl, Clipped Wings (n.p., by the author, n.d.), 51; Neary, Stalag Luft III: Sagan, 5.

Caramel pie: Burnt sugar and milk, with cracker crumbs for thickening.

Snow ice-cream: Childhood recipe of snow, condensed milk, sugar and chocolate.

Freezer ice-cream: Regular recipe, prepared in a freezer constructed of a large German jam can, three klim cans soldered together, wooden or tin paddles, and a bow or wooden gears for turning. The ice-cream industry was limited to those periods when the camp fire-pool was frozen.

Pulverized crackers were the primary source of "flour" for making pie crusts, cakes, cookies, and thickening. Baking powder was always scarce since it was never issued and few were lucky enough to get some from home. Most cooks used a tooth powder that contained a hint of soda or else aerated the batter by tiresome beating, hence the great demand for tin egg beaters. As one source notes, "Occasionally the finished product was light and fluffy. The other extreme was well illustrated by the solid mass which held its shape when a prankster fastened it to the wall with a single nail."³⁰

By drawing on all the food sources mentioned above and using the food in the best way they knew how, the prisoners could expect to enjoy a daily menu resembling the following:

Breakfast - 9:00 a.m.

Two slices of German bread with spread
Coffee (soluble) or tea during lean periods
(for the Americans—the reverse was true
for the British)

Lunch - noon

Soup (3-4 days a week from the camp kitchen)
Slice of German bread
Coffee or tea

³⁰Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3A (2).

Supper - 5:30 p.m.

Potatoes

1/3 can of meat (spam, corned beef, etc.)

Vegetables, possibly twice a week

Slice of German bread

Coffee or tea

Evening snack - 10:00 p.m.

Dessert—pie, cake, etc.

Coffee or cocoa

The prisoners often saved up for a big "bash" on a special occasion such as a birthday or holiday. Elaborate menus were drawn up for such events and usually carried the notice "Due to unforeseen events, spam has been substituted for the scheduled turkey." In 1943 and 1944 the prisoners received specially prepared Red Cross Christmas parcels and these added greatly to the festivities.

Few manners were displayed at mealtime, and there was never a second helping. But great care was always given to the equal sharing of food, especially when it came to cutting cakes and pies. Usually the man who cut the dessert had to take the last piece as an incentive for him to be judicious in the use of his knife. Everyone else in the room drew straws to determine who would get first, second, and third pick of the pieces and on down the line just in case some pieces might still be a shade larger than the others.

Everything considered, the prisoners obtained enough food to sustain their health until the fall of 1944. Thereafter they began to lose weight and strength. Because they were on meager diets all along, their stomachs shrank, and the rare "bashes" often caused sickness. But if their stomachs were sometimes satisfied, it seems that the same cannot be said for their palates. The pies and cakes were relished, not because they were good by normal standards, but because everything else in their diet was so bland. It is doubtful if a former

prisoner would care to eat any of his room-cooked meals today. In Stalag Luft III, as one might well expect, the philosophy the prisoners had to adopt was "eat to live" rather than "live to eat."

Clothing

It did not take long for new prisoners to learn that the Germans had no intention of observing that part of the Geneva Convention which required the detaining power to furnish clothing and footwear. They also knew that clothing, like food, stood very high on the list of necessities in a prison camp. There were times when the lack of clothing became a serious matter, and again it was the Red Cross which helped the prisoners most in their moments of need.

The prisoners' search for clothes began at Dulag Luft, for it was there that they often had their leather jackets, flying boots, and electrically-wired flying suits taken away from them by the Germans. The Germans refused to permit the prisoners to use the American Army Air Force uniforms until the spring of 1943, claiming that they were too "mufty," or civilian-looking. To replace the confiscated clothing, the new prisoners were given a sweater, a pair of socks, and a pair of long winter underwear, usually supplied by the British Red Cross. Dulag Luft was supposed to be the main issue point for clothes, but the amounts available there were seldom sufficient. Thus the prisoners usually arrived at Stalag Luft III poorly clothed. Their plight was not serious during the summer, but at the onset of winter the search for adequate clothing became intense.

The Germans provided little clothing. The prisoners and the Protecting Power repeatedly appealed to the Germans to supply clothes, but the latter's only significant contribution came in the early autumn

of 1943 when they issued boots and overcoats that were mainly booty from France and Belgium. In addition, they provided each barracks with about twelve pairs of booty trousers which the prisoners could borrow and wear while they washed and dried the one pair they owned. The two blankets they provided each prisoner were thin and inadequate for a northern climate. When pressed to supply more clothes, the Germans replied that they would be happy to supply additional booty clothes on condition that they be clearly marked and that the prisoners turn in all their other clothes. They adamantly refused to let the prisoners have two sets of clothing, claiming that too often one set was converted to civilian clothes for escape.³¹

Prior to the fall of 1943, the Americans had to rely primarily upon the British Red Cross for clothes. As with food, the British

³¹Report by J. E. Friedrich, delegate of the International Red Cross, concerning a visit made on September 13, 1942, File No. 740.00114EW/3049, Record Group 59; Protecting Power Report No. 1, concerning a visit made on December 9, 1942 by Gabriel Naville and Dr. Kurt Schaeffeler of the Swiss Legation at Berlin, "Stalag Luft III" Folder, "Camp Reports-Germany-Stalag Luft" File, Record Group 389; Report of visit made on February 22, 1943 by Dr. Bubb, delegate of the International Red Cross, File No. 740.00114EW/3977, Record Group 59; Protecting Power Report No. 2, concerning a visit made on March 22-23, 1944 by Gabriel Naville and Dr. Aloys Schnieper, representatives of the Swiss Legation at Berlin, "Stalag Luft III" Folder, "Camp Reports-Germany-Stalag Luft" File, Record Group 389; Protecting Power Report No. 3 concerning a visit made on July 6-7, 1943 by Gabriel Naville, representative of the Swiss Legation at Berlin, "Stalag Luft III" Folder, "Camp Reports-Germany-Stalag Luft" File, Record Group 389; Report of visit made on July 26, 1943 by Dr. Lehner, delegate of the International Red Cross, File No. 711.62114 A.I.R./30, Record Group 59; Protecting Power Report No. 4, concerning a visit made on October 25-26, 1943 by Gabriel Naville, representative of the Swiss Legation at Berlin, File No. 711.62114 A.I.R./53, Record Group 59; Protecting Power Report No. 5, concerning a visit made on February 22-24, 1944 by Gabriel Naville, representative of the Swiss Legation at Berlin, File No. 711.62114 A.I.R./137, Record Group 59.

Prior to the fall of 1943, the Americans had to rely primarily upon the British Red Cross for clothes. As with food, the British and Dominion countries already had a cooperative clothes supply system in operation when the Americans arrived. The clothing store was situated in the East Vorlager and was supervised by Germans and operated by British and American prisoners. The prisoners could put their names on a list for items they needed, and usually when a shipment of clothes arrived it had already been entirely spoken for. Eventually every man in camp acquired a fairly complete set of clothes either through the Red Cross or through gifts from home in next-of-kin parcels. As usual, some men dressed extremely well, some were neat but not well-dressed, and some were quite unpresentable.

The camp goal was to provide everyone with at least the following minimum set of clothes:

1 overcoat	1 pair high shoes
1 blouse or jacket	1 scarf
3 pairs of socks	1 pair of gloves
1 pair of wool trousers	1 belt or suspenders
3 shirts	1 cap
3 pairs of winter under- wear	4 handkerchiefs
1 sweater	1 blanket

Since the Red Cross clothes were considered only a loan rather than a gift, the prisoners had to be reminded continually that they were not at liberty to modify their clothes according to their own desires. Nevertheless, many of them did so, preferring to make cut-offs for the summer rather than putting patches over patches, or converting greatcoats into sports jackets, removing the linings to make athletic shorts, or cutting them to obtain materials for hoods and mittens. Part of Spivey's cleanup campaign was directed against slovenly dress and unmended clothes, as well as against the tendency of some men to

appear at Appell dressed in nothing but their sunbathing "ball-bags," a prisoner version of the primitive loin cloth made out of an old sock.

The military clothing received through the Red Cross was regular enlisted army stock and quite serviceable, as it needed to be since a pair of trousers that was worn every day was expected to last one year. However, the American officers felt self-conscious about the fact that they were the only ones in camp that did not receive insignia and proper dress uniforms. A special request was sent asking for dress uniforms for the compound staff so that they might appear dressed in proper attire before the Kommandant and at formal gatherings, such as funerals or when acting as escorts for visiting dignitaries. The special uniforms never came, but by borrowing uniform items from various prisoners, several good and complete uniforms could be put together for special occasions.

Another complaint the prisoners had about the clothing sent them was that it was often too small. Out of one shipment of over one thousand coats, only about ten per cent were size thirty-eight or larger. Another report indicates that a stock of one thousand pajamas offered nothing larger than that required for a five-year old child. Shoes also were frequently too small. One survey showed that the average shoe size needed in camp was 9C, but that until the summer of 1944 the average size shoe on hand was about a size seven. A special order was filled in Berlin for a man who required a size 13-1/2 shoe.³²

³²John J. Lee, former worker in the Red Cross Clothing Store in Stalag Luft III, to Delmar T. Spivey, February 27, 1948, "Red Cross

Medical and Dental Care

Visitors to Stalag Luft III frequently commented on the good state of the prisoners' health. The prisoners too were surprised that they stayed so healthy. But once again the primary credit for the good state of health among the prisoners belongs not to the Germans, but to the Red Cross and to the prisoners themselves.

One Red Cross inspector who visited the camp made note of the "very healthful" climate around Sagan and asserted that the class of prisoners he saw "evidently represent[ed] an elite from the physical point of view."³³ In all important respects his observations were correct. The camp was located well away from all combat zones, slum districts, and industrial areas. The prisoners complained about the damp rainy spring and cold winter weather, but the climate at Sagan was not unusually harsh. And it is true that the prisoners represented a physical elite, since the physical requirements for fliers have always been among the strictest found in any of the services. But the

Clothing Store" Folder, Spivey Collection; Mulligan, et. al. "History of Center Compound," Part I, Section 1h; Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3A(3); Delmar T. Spivey to Maurice Pate, Director of Prisoner War Relief, American Red Cross, May 13, 1944, File No. 619.2, "American and Allied POWs-Europe-Germany," Archives Division [National Headquarters], American Red Cross, File No. 740.00114EW/3977, Record Group 59; Report of visit made on May 22, 1944 by Dr. Rossel and Mr. Paul Wyss, delegates of the International Red Cross, "Stalag Luft III" Folder, "Camp Reports-Germany-Stalag Luft" File, Record Group 389.

³³Report of visit made on September 13, 1942 by J. E. Friedrich, delegate of the International Red Cross, File No. 740.00114EW/3049, Record Group 59.

presence of these two favorable factors did not eliminate the prisoners' worries regarding their health. To the contrary, they were very concerned about their physical well-being and had good reason to be, for the medical care provided in Stalag Luft III was quite inadequate for their needs.

The prisoners required health care in several broad areas. Injuries constituted one of their greatest problems. Many crewmen arrived in camp suffering from combat wounds which either had not been properly dressed or still needed extensive medical attention. The heavy emphasis on sports activities also added to the number of prisoners suffering from injuries. The danger of epidemics was another major medical concern. The settling of large numbers of persons in one location for an extended period of time has always posed problems for armies, and Stalag Luft III was no exception. Especially when crowding occurred, it became increasingly important to combat infectious diseases before they could reach epidemic proportions. Of course, there were the unexpected medical emergencies, as well as the everyday colds and viruses. Dental problems comprised yet another area of concern. The unbalanced diet contributed to tooth decay over a period of time, and some of the men had received jaw wounds or otherwise suffered damage to their teeth at the time they were shot down or later while engaged in sports. Perhaps the area of greatest concern, however, pertained to the treatment of mental cases, usually referred to as victims of "barbed wire psychosis."

The Germans made a variety of arrangements for the prisoners' medical and dental care. When the camp opened in 1942, one hut in the Vorlager served as the Revier, or infirmary, and the dental office.

The infirmary contained around forty beds with about five or six beds in each room. A German doctor supervised the Revier, and two English doctors took care of the patients. Surgical cases were sent to the large French-operated hospital located about one mile away in Stalag VIII C, and x-rays were taken in the local hospital in Sagan. Dental work was handled by two dentists, one German and one British. About twenty patients a day asked for dental treatment. Both the facilities and the staff were too small to take care of the patients, the capacity of the infirmary being less than two per cent of the prisoner population, with an average of eighty men reporting for sick call each day. Medicine was in short supply, and the Red Cross medical parcels were the only adequate source of new medicine. The Red Cross also supplied Invalid Food parcels which contained white bread and other items needed by those who had to be put on special diets.³⁴

Conditions improved briefly in the spring and summer of 1943. In East Vorlager the dental office was moved into a separate building, and the vacant space left behind was filled with more hospital beds until accommodations were completed for about sixty patients. Medical supplies were increased with the Germans contributing some stocks, and in July a dental prosthetic laboratory was opened in the camp.

The prisoners in the new North Compound received medical care in a seventeen-bed Revier built in the West Vorlager (so named because North Compound was originally called "West" Compound and also to distinguish it from "East" Vorlager; even though West Vorlager was

³⁴Protecting Power Report No. 1, concerning a visit made on December 9, 1942 by Gabriel Naville and Dr. Kurt Schaeffeler of the Swiss Legation at Berlin, "Stalag Luft III" Folder, "Camp Reports-Germany-Stalag Luft" File, Record Group 389.

adjacent to North Compound, the name was essentially correct since the facilities in this Vorlager were shared by North, South, and West Compounds, all of which were located west of the Kommandantur). The Revier in West Vorlager was named by two British doctors who were assisted by a number of French and Serbian medical orderlies. The British medical officers asked for and received a large table and blankets for the massage room to help them take care of the sixty patients undergoing therapy.

Despite these improvements, the health care provided the prisoners was still inadequate at times. When inquiries were made on behalf of seven prisoners who needed operations, the Germans granted surgery to only two of them, saying the others could wait a year or two without jeopardizing the success of the operations. Strictly speaking, they may have been correct, but in the case of one patient who suffered from repeated tonsillitis, the German decision hardly seemed justified. In another case, the British medical staff said Sub-Lieutenant John Kiddell needed to be transferred to a private mental hospital. The German authorities, however, refused to transfer him because of the findings of their own "experts" which showed that his problems were not serious or recurrent. Kiddell was killed on July 1, 1943, during "an attempt to escape while at the height of his mania." Endeavoring to flee from the infirmary, he was caught under the barbed wire, and the sentinel, who did not know the prisoner killed him.³⁵

³⁵The Kiddell case is discussed in Report of visit made on July 26, 1943 by Dr. Lehner, delegate of the International Red Cross, File No. 711.62114 A.I.R./30, Record Group 59 and Report of visit made on February 22, 1943 by Mr. Friedrich and Dr. Bubb, delegates of the

There were some complaints about the non-English speaking orderlies, but the Germans were reluctant to put British personnel in these jobs because of the constant fear that they might help the prisoners escape. Finally in early 1944 English and American orderlies were admitted in the Reviers. About this time also the first American medical officers arrived. Prior to that time, the Americans received all their medical care from British personnel.

The addition of more British and Americans to the hospital staffs was one of the few bright spots on an otherwise rather dismal medical scene in 1944. It is true that on July 1, 1944 the Germans opened a new sixty-bed facility in West Vorlager and continued to add to it with the aim of eventually providing 150 beds, but the influx of new prisoners was so great that, in spite of the enlargement, the facilities were never adequate. Medicine again became scarce. Dental parades were reduced from three to two per week because of the shortage of guards, and the waiting time for dental work increased from only a few days in the summer of 1943 to several months by the end of 1944. East Revier had deteriorated and was badly in need of repair. The beds were basically the same hard mattresses used in the barracks, and consequently the patients developed bed sores. As overcrowding became widespread among the compounds, the danger of epidemics increased. And as some of the older prisoners began to mark off their

International Red Cross, File No. 740.00114EW/3977, Record Group 59. The other information pertaining to the care provided in the spring and summer of 1943 is extracted from the above mentioned reports and Protecting Power Report No. 3, concerning a visit made on July 6-7, 1943 by Gabriel Naville, representative of the Swiss Legation at Berlin, "Stalag Luft III" Folder, "Camp Reports-Germany-Stalag Luft" File, Record Group 389.

fourth and fifth years in captivity, the number of mental cases increased. The only chance of reducing the instances of barbed wire psychosis would have been to increase the number of parole walks outside the camp or to commence a program of repatriating prisoners after they had been in captivity a certain length of time. Both these sources of relief were sought, but to no avail. The only prisoners who were repatriated were a few individuals who went before and were passed by a mixed medical commission which judged them medically unsuited for further incarceration.³⁶

The Americans suffered less from barbed wire psychosis than the British primarily because they were not in captivity as long and because the British worried more about their families and homes which were being subjected to bombing raids. One doctor who spent considerable time in Center Compound stated that there were fewer mental abnormalities among the prisoners in Center than in any group of civilians of comparable size. The prisoners attributed this absence of serious cases in large part to the thorough screening crewmen

³⁶No figures are available on how many prisoners were repatriated from Stalag Luft III, but it is known that on at least three occasions groups of various sizes left the camp for home. For accounts of how the repatriation system worked as well as the deteriorating medical conditions after the fall of 1943, see Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3B(2); Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part I, Section 11; Protecting Power Report No. 4, concerning a visit made on October 24-26, 1943, File No. 711.62114 A.I.R./53, Record Group 59; Protecting Power Report No. 5, concerning a visit made on February 22-24, 1944 by Gabriel Naville, representative of the Swiss Legation at Berlin, File No. 711.62114 A.I.R./137, Record Group 59; Protecting Power Report No. 8, concerning a visit made on November 7, 1944 by Albert A. Kadler, representative of the Swiss Legation at Berlin, "Stalag Luft III" Folder, "Camp Reports-Germany-Stalag Luft" File, Record Group 389.

received before they were ever allowed to fly and to the fact that fliers were carefully watched by fellow crewmen to ensure that "shaky" individuals were taken off the flight rosters before each mission so as not to jeopardize the mission and other crewmen.³⁷

The prisoners set up First Aid stations in each compound to screen patients asking to go to the Revier and to take care of minor medical problems and physical therapy cases. Usually the First Aid stations were manned by individuals who had had medical experience before capture. Every effort was made to obtain medical books so that they might increase their knowledge both to help them do a better job while in camp and to prepare them for further training, if they desired, after they returned home. In some instances, a fully qualified medical doctor also served in the First Aid stations. The work load here was also very heavy, the records showing that in South Compound alone over 20,000 requests for medical assistance were answered in a one-year period.³⁸

Sanitation and Personal Hygiene

Upon arrival at Stalag Luft III, the new prisoners were often shocked and dismayed by the sight of those already in residence, many of whom were unshaven, had long dirty-looking hair or haircuts of weird design, and wore unkempt clothes. The new prisoners were themselves tired, unshaven, and dirty from their long train trip, but were usually filled with resolve that they would never "let themselves go"

³⁷Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part I, Section 1i.

³⁸Ibid.; Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3B(2).

as the older prisoners standing before them obviously had done. They were soon to learn, however, that this was easier said than accomplished.

Most of the new men were deloused and were able to shower before they entered a compound. After that they were on their own and quickly discovered that the authorized one hot shower per week was seldom forthcoming. Long lines assembled for the shower parades into the Vorlager, and in cold weather the rewards hardly seemed worth the effort. The shower huts located in North and South compounds could not be used for months on end because the proper pipe fittings or boilers were missing. In North Compound the prisoners were not allowed to go on shower parades for several months because of an attempted escape by men who left the compound on a fictitious delousing parade in July 1943. In South Compound it took so long to get the shower hut working that many men went over a year without a hot shower. Colonel Goodrich, in fact, cannot recall ever having received a hot shower during the entire thirty-four month period he was at Sagan.³⁹

The alternative was to take sponge baths or cold showers. As noted earlier, however, the water table at Sagan was about 300 feet below the surface and the water was accordingly extremely cold and few men stayed under the sprinkler buckets attached to the spigots for more than a minute or two. In winter cold showers were understandably forsaken altogether. Sponge baths were preferred, but here too water was a problem since it had to be heated on the busy kitchen stoves which became free, if at all, only late at night. Soap was extremely scarce in Germany, but the prisoners received ample amounts

³⁹Interview with Charles G. Goodrich, November 18, 1975.

from the Red Cross and from home. All in all, bathing was possible, but it was easily postponed.

Shaving was another unusually difficult chore. There were very few razor blades available; obtaining hot water was always a problem; and shaving facilities in the washrooms were limited. As one prisoner recalls:

The luxuries of an early morning shave in the washroom were enjoyed only by those who got up before appel [sic]. Sweating out a basin and mirror after appel [sic], a man could stand there all morning, awaiting his turn, watching his lukewarm water getting colder

When one of the basins was empty, a waiting Kriegie placed his can on the sink and lathered up his face, using the klintin of water for steaming up his face, softening his beard and brushing up the suds. Once the actual shaving began, the razor was sloshed in the can to rinse free soap and beard. Ice cold water from the taps served as an astringent and skin tone conditioner. Often a couple of 'buddies' would lean over the same basin, sharing the same hard-to-come by water.⁴⁰

Because of these difficulties, men often shaved in their rooms, hunched over small mirrors propped up on tables or in front of the windows.

Haircuts were largely a matter of personal taste and convenience. At first there was a shortage of barber tools, and in a few of the compounds enlisted men used what few tools were available to cut their own and their comrade's hair. In time the Y.M.C.A. supplied enough clippers for nearly every block, but as these wore out the prisoners had to rely on the services of a few individuals who had procured tools through personal parcels and had set up private enterprise barber shops. The most frequent solution, however, was for

⁴⁰R. W. Kimball and O. M. Chiesl, Clipped Wings (n.p.: by the author, n.d.), n.p.

the prisoners to borrow the tools and cut each other's hair.

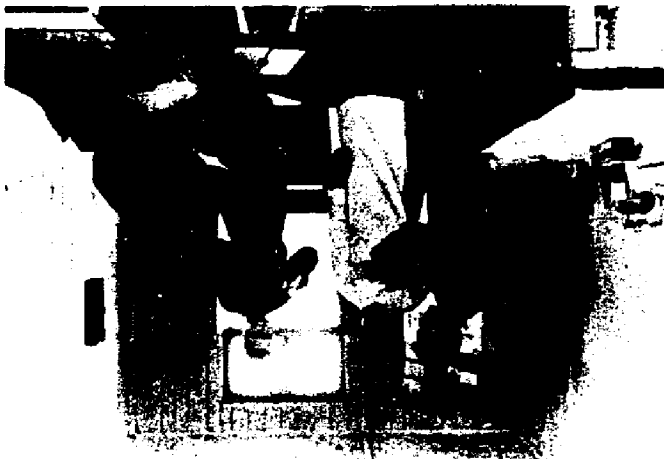
Many prisoners chose to wear their hair long, but in the summer months it was not unusual to see numerous shaved heads. Novel designs sometimes appeared, either as a result of personal experimentation or as the price of a lost wager. Mohawk cuts were seen quite frequently, but the ones that caught the most attention were those with one side of the head shaved and the other side untrimmed. Colonel Spivey stirred some controversy soon after he arrived by proclaiming "I hate hairy people," he himself being bald. However, almost all the beards and handlebar moustaches in Center Compound disappeared. As the Compound historians noted in their log after his announcement, "The appearance of the men improved and we realized definitely that ours was not a prison camp in the old traditional sense of the word. Anyhow we could afford to leave the growing of beards and handlebars to the British. They were better at it than we."⁴¹

When East and Center Compounds first opened, clothes were sent out to a laundry shop in Sagan, but as the prisoner population increased, the downtown facilities could not handle the work load, and sometimes it took two months for the prisoners to get their clothes back. By the time North Compound opened, the prisoners were doing most of their own laundry, and nearly all of it was done in camp by early 1944.

It was hard to keep one's clothes clean when the same set of clothes had to be worn virtually every day. As noted earlier, the

⁴¹Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part I, Section 1g; Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3B(11).

PLANT AND ROOM



PLANT AND ROOM



THE WASH HUT



A TYPICAL ROOM



PLANT AND ROOM

Germans provided about twelve pair of booty trousers for the prisoners to wear while they washed their own. Again, obtaining hot water took time and the wash house was usually crowded. In South Compound, for example, an average of 200 men used the cement basins and troughs every day. An alternative method of washing clothes was to place them in a "bucket washer," which was nothing more than a large tin can with a smaller can inside that was attached to and could be worked up and down by a broom handle to agitate the soapy water.

As mentioned earlier, soap was extremely scarce in Germany, but the prisoners received a bar in every Red Cross parcel, and later GI soap began to arrive in large quantities. Everything considered, there was no reason why a prisoner could not keep clean, but washing clothes, like taking showers, was an easy task to postpone, and many men accordingly never did look neat and clean.⁴²

The individual rooms were cleaned by the occupants, usually on a rotational basis. Cleaning supplies were always scarce, but the task had to be undertaken on a regular basis in order to keep the bed bugs and lice under control. A typical monthly issue of cleaning materials for the entire camp included the following:

- 18 brooms
- 20 deck scrubs
- 15 hand scrubs
- 3 - 4 kilograms carbolineum
- 25 kilograms chlorical

The brooms were of especially poor quality and the supply wore out quickly. This meant that before a prisoner could sweep out his

⁴²Kimball and Chiesl, Clipped Wings, n.p.; Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3B(5); Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part I, Section 1f.

room he had to go to considerable length to get "next" on the broom. The rooms often received a very thorough cleansing in the spring just after the cold weather broke. One prisoner describes the process:

Furniture was removed from the rooms. Walls, ceilings and floors were completely swabbed down. Men of one room would form a bucket brigade from the kitchen, slosh bucket after bucket onto the walls and floors and scrub and clean away the winter's grime and soot. Windows were washed and shined sparkling clean with newspapers.⁴³

Another account adds that in an effort to get rid of the bedbugs and lice the same procedure was followed only with a little more thoroughness:

This involved removal of all furniture, dissembl[ing] of wall and ceiling panels and wooden bedsteads as well as the removal and changing of wood ticking in paliasses (mattress) [sic] and airing of bedclothes and linen. All suspected or confirmed hiding places of the offenders were swabbed and soaked with creosote or strong soap solutions The above duty accomplished by nightful, weary prisoners tossed their last chair through the open window, followed it, and crept into their beds—with a silent prayer on each pair of lips for a few nights uninterrupted sleep⁴⁴

In addition to bedbugs and lice, the prisoners had to combat the sanitation problems created by the appearance of common houseflies, blue and green bottle flies, and mosquitoes. Window and door screens were unavailable, so the prisoners' efforts were bent toward eliminating the insect's breeding and feeding grounds and pre-

⁴³Kimball and Chiesl, Clipped Wings, n.p.

⁴⁴Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3B (3).

venting the bugs from carrying disease from garbage, refuse piles, and the latrines to the mess table.

Following the practice Lieutenant Colonel Clark started back in East Compound, all the latrines were ventilated and sealed off with burlap as much as possible. Springs from exercise machines sent by the Y.M.C.A. were attached to the latrine doors to keep them closed, and window box and conical type flytraps were installed. In South Compound, at least, a crew thoroughly scrubbed and cleaned the aborts daily while others attended to the garbage disposal areas and incinerators.⁴⁵

The prisoners had to keep after the Germans to ensure that the pit-latrines were emptied on schedule. When the Honeywagon finally came, the men were both pleased and displeased, for the odor stirred up by the process of extracting the sewage proved to be nauseating. The prisoners always marveled at the seeming indifference of the German civilians contracted to do this unpleasant task, especially when they noticed them eating their lunches without leaving the pump.

One last sanitation item that deserves mention revolved around the habits of spitting and urinating outside in the barracks area. The Europeans objected to the filthy American habit of spitting on the ground. The Americans in turn objected to the promiscuous urinating of the guards and protested when the latter urinated in the same places where the Americans were not supposed to spit. Another difference between German and American customs came to the surface when the Germans volunteered to let the prisoners put the contents of the

⁴⁵Ibid.

aborts on the camp gardens. The offer was declined and the prisoners let their requests for horse manure stand.⁴⁶

The Incidentals in the Supply System

The prisoners' internal administrative system, the food they ate, the clothes they wore, the medical treatment they received and the measures they undertook to maintain their health and observe the basic rules of good sanitation were all affected by several incidentals in the supply system with which the new prisoner had to acquaint himself.

The Y.M.C.A. Clothing Store, for example, handled more than simply clothes. Through this facility passed most of the toilet and other miscellaneous items which the men used—tooth paste, tooth brushes, soap, combs, shaving cream, razor blades and razors, toilet paper, shoe laces, shoe repair materials and tools. On one occasion,

⁴⁶ Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3A(1). The spitting problem became so serious that General Vanaman felt compelled to have Colonel Spivey issue the following memorandum on December 8, 1944: "It is desired to bring to the attention of all concerned the filthy and vulgar habit of spitting. Many contagious diseases are transferable by this means and if for no other reason it should be cut to the minimum. It is the duty of each individual in this compound to carefully consider the health, comfort and welfare of every other individual and to never wantonly or willfully, by act or word, do or say anything that will make this already miserable life more intolerable. You are therefore urged to carefully consider the low and uncouth habit of expectorating at random and if you must hawk or spit have the decency to cover it or spit over the guard rail. Under no circumstances are you to commit this vile act within doors or on public walks." Mulligran, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part III (Diary), December 8, 1944. The Germans did use the prisoners "night soil" in a large cabbage and potato garden situated in the East Vorlager. The prisoners objected to eating the cabbage and potatoes from the garden but their protests were ignored. Interview with Albert P. Clark, April 15, 1976.

some twelve tons of toilet tissue were received in one shipment. One of the store workers reports that the shipment completely filled two freight cars and that when it was unloaded in the store it made the floors sag as much as six inches. The paper was extremely welcome since the Germans supplied only one small sheet a day measuring about four by four inches. Colonel Spivey recalls that earlier, when a much smaller quantity arrived by train, the staff in Center decided to issue four sheets a day to each man. In order to be fair about the matter, one of the store workers brought a whole roll to Spivey's office where the worker and three full colonels painstakingly unrolled it and counted the sheets. Spivey's final observation on the subject was "The blamed stuff was all over our room and when we finally re-rolled it, it was as big as a nail keg. I think I caught as much hell from the boys for rationing TP as I did for any other thing I ever did in camp."⁴⁷ Toilet articles could also be obtained through the canteen.

The canteen offered quite a variety of items during the early years of the war, but by the time the Americans arrived stocks of meerschaum pipes, straight razors, fine china, wooden shoes, and other such luxuries that had been bought on the German market in large quantities were exhausted. All supplies were ordered through a central purchasing office that was run by the British until June 1944 and thereafter by the Americans. When the goods arrived, they were distributed to each compound according to its strength. Every compound

⁴⁷Spivey, "History," 62-63; John J. Lee to Delmar T. Spivey, February 27, 1948, "Red Cross Clothing Store" Folder, Spivey Collection.

had its own canteen, and each block had its own canteen officer to whom tooth brushes, tooth powder, shaving equipment, and other items were given as requested. When special shipments came in, issues again were made to each of the blocks according to strength. Sometimes the canteen benefited prisoners indirectly and made their lives brighter by providing items such as paint for the theater interior and sets, varied musical supplies, sanitation aids, and some of the spices and seasonings used in the cookhouses.⁴⁸

Items in large quantities and of every description came to the prisoners through the Y.M.C.A. store in the Vorlager. Although concerned primarily with providing religious, athletic, educational, and entertainment materials, the Y.M.C.A. answered innumerable miscellaneous requests for items ranging all the way from medical supplies, such as crutches and prescription eyeglasses, to wrist watches and modeling kits.⁴⁹ All incoming goods were carefully inventoried and distributed according to everybody's needs. As far as possible, the British and Americans each received the materials sent by their respective countries, but there were exceptions to this rule, especially when a new compound opened and everyone contributed items to help the prisoners assigned there get started with their many community projects.

Other incidentals that affected camp life from day to day can be viewed through the unending battles between the prisoners and the

⁴⁸Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3B(8).

⁴⁹An extensive collection of order forms for miscellaneous items requested through Y.M.C.A. channels is found in several uncatalogued folders contained in the "Prisoner of War" drawer in the Research Division of the Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio.

Germans over the use and abuse of items listed on individual and group property accounts. The Germans were most reluctant to replace broken items and were extremely slow when it came to effecting needed repairs. These were battles that the prisoners, through no fault of their own, almost always lost.

Poor lighting was one of the worst features of Stalag Luft III. Each sleeping room had either one sixty or two forty-watt bulbs, and the indoor washrooms, latrines, and kitchens had mostly fifteen-watt bulbs. For a long time, the electricity was shut off completely during daylight hours, but after the prisoners promised not to use the lights in the barracks, the electricity was left on all day so that artificial lighting would be available in the libraries, reading rooms, and classrooms.

The low wattage was in itself a problem, but the real difficulty came in obtaining replacements for burned-out bulbs and getting faulty wiring fixed. Although it is not known whether the following statement was made in reference to South Compound only or to the entire camp, it is revealing to find that "With an average German issue of 22 bulbs per month and a monthly shortage of 75 to 100 bulbs many rooms that should have burned 80 watts could get only a single 15-watt bulb issue."⁵⁰ In most compounds lights were taken out of the hallways and latrines for use in the rooms. The Germans charged that the prisoners were abusing the lighting system either through carelessness or by tapping into the wiring for tunnel lights. Colonel von Lindeiner reported that, in East Compound where there were 160

⁵⁰Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3A(4).

sockets, the prisoners obtained during one period, mostly without his approval, 167 bulbs, which represented a one hundred and twenty per cent yearly use rate. This must have really upset the Germans since they estimated that a light bulb should normally last three years! In this case most of the evidence seems to favor the prisoners' argument that they were not to blame for the poor lighting situation. In July 1943 a Red Cross inspector reported that the lighting was below standard because of the weakness of the current. Tunnel wiring might have contributed somewhat to this problem, but it is more likely that the wiring problems the prisoners detected in the existing system provide the best answer. The list included:

- Leads into blocks were not properly joined
- Junction boxes inside blocks were broken causing much shorting
- Leaking roofs wet inside wires
- Loose barrack flooring and construction caused constant jarring of light fixtures, thus weakening filaments
- Thirty fuses burnt out from abnormal loading
- Questionable voltage control resulting in unsteady and flickering lighting

Fortunately, the Y.M.C.A. was able to send a large quantity of bulbs into the camp. The number of bulbs was never sufficient, but the addition of the Y.M.C.A. bulbs did improve matters greatly.⁵¹

Window panes were another item that was seldom replaced. The prisoners admit to breaking some of the panes with carelessly thrown balls, and in Center Compound a regulation was published prohibiting

⁵¹Report of visit on July 26, 1943 by Dr. Lehner, delegate of the International Red Cross, File No. 711.62114 A.I.R./30, Record Group 59; Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3A(4); Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part I, Section 1c; Report of visit made on February 22, 1943 by Mr. Friedrich and Dr. Bubb, delegates of the International Red Cross, File No. 740.00114EW/3977, Record Group 59.

all activities in and around the barracks that endangered the windows. What they did not accept, however, was the reluctance on the part of the German staff to supply adequate amounts of wood to cover the openings left by the broken panes. In Center Compound alone there were 281 broken panes by January 1945.⁵²

The prisoners did as much of their own repair work as possible by organizing compound utility crews and repair shops staffed with competent electricians, carpenters, and tinsmiths. They repaired bedsteads, built extra tables, shelves, and other furniture, cleaned the indoor latrines which were often clogged by newspapers that were used in the absence of toilet tissue, replaced sections of roofing torn off by high winds, repaired faucets, rigged and maintained the tin-can showers, and served as "trouble shooters" for minor electrical failures in the blocks. Tools for these various tasks were usually obtained from the Germans on parole, but a few items also were sent by the Y.M.C.A. or in personal parcels.⁵³

Tools were also acquired on parole from the Germans to clear stumps out of the athletic fields and procure wood for fuel. The shortage of coal was constantly reported to the Protecting Power representatives who, in this instance, seemed inclined to take the German side of the argument. During the winter of 1942-1943, the representatives acknowledged that "the coal ration cannot have been sufficient" in Center Compound, but stated that the situation there

⁵²Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part I, Section 1c; Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3A(4).

⁵³Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3A(4); Spivey, "History," 70-71.

was not as serious as in the Internees' or Repatriables' camps, and that in any case no representation would be made to the German authorities as the coal supply was the same as for German troops. A later report stated that at one point the matter was discussed with the camp authorities and that they referred to the findings of a recent commission that had been charged to find out what the daily supply of coal should amount to, and that the commission concluded that twelve kilos would be quite sufficient, that the fifteen kilos given to the prisoners each day (at the time) represented a liberal ration, and that the prisoners "had any amount of wood at their disposal would they only be prepared to collect it."⁵⁴

The prisoners in turn questioned the quality of the coal. They noted that the coal they received was the final product of the great coal conversion plants in Germany after the plants had extracted ingredients used to produce synthetic oil, margarine, and countless other items. By the time it reached the final stage of the half-kilogram bricks which the prisoners received it retained little of its original qualities outside of color and lacked heating power, especially when used in small quantities.

The stumps augmented the coal supply and the Germans asserted that prisoners could go out on parole to collect wood. There is

⁵⁴Protecting Power Report No. 3 concerning a visit made on July 6-7, 1943 by Gabriel Naville, representative of the Swiss Legation at Berlin, "Stalag Luft III" Folder, "Camp Reports-German-Stalag Luft" File, Record Group 389; Report of visit made on February 22, 1943 by Mr. Friedrich and Dr. Bubb, delegates of the International Red Cross, File No. 740.00114EW/3977, Record Group 59; Report of visit made on September 13, 1942 by J. E. Friedrich, representative of the International Red Cross, File No. 740.00114EW/3049, Record Group 59.

nothing in the available records to verify that wood gathering trips were in fact allowed, but there are numerous accounts depicting the difficulty of pulling the stumps. One prisoner describes the process:

The Germans provided a large stump puller for this bulldozer task. Monstrous and grotesque, the stump puller, a tall wooden derrick was operated and moved about by sheer bodily force The derrick stood ten feet high and had two twelve foot long wooden lever arms extending from the top. They were connected to . . . [a] long iron lifting rod that ran down the center of the derrick; at the end of this rod, a heavy iron chain and a clasp hook which was used to fasten around and under the roots of the stump.

A ditch about two to three feet deep was dug all around the stump down to the larger roots, allowing enough room to work in. The thicker roots were sawed through before trying to lift out the stump. With the chain fastened snugly around the stump five men at each lever arm on either side alternately raised and lowered their levers. To get the gripping irons to bite firmly on the iron lifting rod, the men at one arm stood on tip-toe and threw the arm upward. Then they jumped up, grabbed hold of the arm and with their combined weight, pulled it down to the ground. This applied force to the lifting rod and caused the stump to be pulled slightly upward. While they held their arm down to the ground, the five men at the other arm, tossed theirs up into the air and repeated the procedure. The chain had to be readjusted several times before the stump was lifted cleanly from the hole. If a room averaged two stumps during their morning session with the stump puller, Kriegies' aching backs, blistered hands and tired muscles screamed to let them know they'd had a workout.⁵⁵

Once the stumps were out of the ground, the prisoners dragged them over to the barracks. Then, whenever a room's turn on the axes and saws came around, two or three men at a time hacked away at the roots

⁵⁵Kimball and Chiesl, Clipped Wings, n.p.

and the base of the stumps.

The prisoners found other ways to keep warm. Uniforms were remodeled for warmth; lower halves of overcoats were cut off and fashioned into hoods, paper was sewn into linings, and large gloves were tailored out of scraps of material. Paper was also stitched between two blankets which were finished off in quilted fashion or folded over to make sleeping bags with the bottoms sewn shut.⁵⁶

Colonel von Lindeiner repeatedly told the Red Cross and Protecting Power inspectors who visited the camp that the prisoners were entirely unreasonable in their requests for supplies pointing out that he was being asked to give them five times as much as German troops would normally receive.⁵⁷ There is no indication whether he meant that figure to be taken literally or figuratively, and at any rate it would be difficult either to substantiate or deny his claim without having conducted extensive research on the German military supply system. But it is easy to understand the prisoners' point of view that they were not asking for anything more than what the Germans should have provided if they wished to boast that they were living up to the stipulations of the Geneva Convention. The prisoners in Stalag Luft III did not suffer from material want as much as did many prisoners in Germany. But they were quite correct in saying that when it came to responding to their physical needs, the Germans did not live up to their usual reputation for efficiency. With regard to obtaining the

⁵⁶Ibid.; Spivey, "History," 66.

⁵⁷See for example Report of visit made on July 26, 1943 by Dr. Lehner, delegate of the International Red Cross, File No. 711.62114 A.I.R./30, Record Group 59.

necessities, as well as the normal comforts of life, Spivey spoke for all of the prisoners when he confessed that "the inability to get anything accomplished by the Germans or to get their permission to do it ourselves nearly drove me to distraction at times."⁵⁸

⁵⁸Spivey, "History," 54.

STALAG LUFT III: AN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE
IN A WORLD WAR II
GERMAN PRISONER OF WAR CAMP

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CHAPTER IX

MAN TO MAN

Introduction

The community spirit that the prisoners developed and maintained in Stalag Luft III was both strengthened and weakened by the unique man-to-man relationships normally found in prisoner of war camps. Their sense of common identity as soldiers who possessed an operational mission even while in the hands of the enemy, and as men who had to join hands in the face of adversity, often helped them overcome difficulties that might have torn the fabric of communities in different circumstances. At the same time, living under adversity and in such close contact with the enemy frayed the men's nerves to the point where it sometimes caused them to lose sight of community goals and that which was in the group's best interests. The interplay of these constructive and destructive forces affected not only the tenor of community life in the camp, but to a large degree the entire course of events in Stalag Luft III.

Prisoner-German Relations

A wide range of factors affected relations between the prisoners and their captors, but perhaps the most important one was their attitude toward each other. The prisoners were surprisingly frank in this matter, admitting that "the attitude of the German authorities

always depended directly upon whether or not the prisoners were giving trouble As long as there was no escape activity apparent and camp regulations were being followed the Germans were prepared to grant privileges and relax restrictions"¹ No wonder, then, that the Germans earned a reputation for granting few privileges and imposing numerous restrictions on the prisoners, for in Colonel Spivey's words, the prisoners loved nothing better than to "start a fight with the German administration."² Referring to the times he had to rely on the men in Center Compound to support him in his frequent battles with the German administration, Spivey continued: "I never had any difficulties with [the prisoners] in this respect. It was only when I ordered them to do something which seemed to them to be cooperating with the Germans that I had grave [problems]." Colonel Goodrich found the same attitude among the prisoners under his command. As he explained:

It was found that encouragement by the Senior Officer of anti-German activity had value as a morale-booster. The POW always derived great satisfaction in knowing that he had, or anybody had, put something over on the Germans.³

Speaking with the voice of experience, he added:

¹Charles G. Goodrich, "History of the USAAF, Prisoners of War of the South Compound, Stalag Luft III" (unpublished manuscript, 1945), Part I, Section 2B [Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Maxwell AFB, Alabama]. Hereinafter cited as "History of South Compound."

²Delmar T. Spivey, "History of Center Compound" (unpublished manuscript, 1946), 71-72, Spivey Collection [Special Collections Room, USAF Academy Library, Colorado]. Hereinafter cited as "History."

³Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 2B.

It was a delicate matter for the Seniors, however, to align policies that would not bring on too many reprisals from the Germans and yet leave the POW with the feeling of active opposition.⁴

Escape was the most potent form of anti-German activity, but there were many less dramatic, but nevertheless effective, ways of being non-cooperative with the Germans. By far the favorite was "goon-baiting," the name applied to doing whatever one could to upset the German routine and general sense of composure. The forms of activity involved in goon-baiting ranged from humorous to barbaric. On the humorous side was an incident inspired by Jerry Sage, an American who gained a reputation as an avid escaper. A short distance from Stalag Luft III was an Arbeitskorps (German work camp similar to those associated with the Civilian Conservation Corps in the United States), and every morning the Nazi youth tramped to their work along the road outside the wire, shovels over their shoulders, smartly in step, and singing Nazi marching songs. Sage gathered together about 200 men every morning and proceeded to a point near the fence where the prisoners smirked offensively through the wire and noisily sang "Heigh-Ho, Heigh-Ho, it's off to work we go." After four days the Germans changed their route.⁵ One of the prisoners' favorite goon-baiting practices was to get everyone in a room busily engaged in some activity after the lights were turned off at night but just before the German guards came through the barracks on their nightly bed check.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Paul Brickhill, The Great Escape, with an Introduction by George Harsh, a Fawcett Crest Book (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1950), 49.

Several prisoners would sit around the table playing cards, another would mend his clothes, one would read a book, and the rest would similarly occupy themselves. When the guard saw them so busy in the pitch darkness of the room, his curiosity would cause him to flash his light onto the scene. The prisoners would then shade their squinting eyes and rebuke him for making it so bright in the room that nobody could work. The object was to make the guard wonder even more about those "crazy Americans," or even better yet, cause him to worry that there was something going on in regard to escape activities that he was obviously missing.⁶

One of the still humorous, but somewhat more serious forms of goon-baiting, centered around the harassment of the ferrets as they probed their way around the compounds looking for tunnels. Colonel Spivey describes a scene which he witnessed:

A few weeks after my arrival I noticed from my window . . . five or six men scurrying between the hot-water kitchen and their barracks, carrying pitchers full of boiling water. It was unusual since it was not teatime nor mealtime, so I concluded they were carrying water to scrub the barracks. About five minutes later, the German Abwehr (guard) sergeant who was in charge of the ferrets . . . came tearing into my room in the greatest possible state of excitement. I had had several conversations with this man, and as with the commandant, had reached an agreement as to procedure in dealing with men in trouble in my camp. In all cases other than escapes I would be consulted before he took any direct action. So in keeping with this understanding he had to come to find me. Only a German would have kept his word under similar circumstances. At his urgent request I followed him at a dead run to the barracks into which the hot water had been flowing so rapidly from the hot-water

⁶Interview with John M. Storer, April 19, 1975.

kitchen. There I found the greatest possible commotion. The barrack, which was built on pillars about three feet tall to allow searching parties to go under it, was practically empty except for eight or ten Americans madly dashing boiling water on the floor and yelling such incoherent clauses as "here's the SOB," "more water," "teach the bastard a lesson," "scald the SOB," "don't let the skunk escape," [and] "watch the exit," The German sergeant was too excited and angry to talk so I called a halt to the procedure and was greeted with "Why in hell do you have to appear just when we are having a little fun?" Then they explained they had caught a ferret eavesdropping under the barracks and were merely teaching him to mind his own business. The poor ferret was in agony since he couldn't escape without exposing himself to a full pitcher of scalding water, and he couldn't defend himself since he wasn't allowed to carry arms in the camp, so he was trying to change his position under the barracks often enough to avoid [the hot water].

Spivey ended his narrative with the revealing comment, "This incident and many to follow could have resulted in severe action being taken had it not been for the good relations we had with the German administration at this time [summer 1943]."⁷

Those good relations were jeopardized by the worst kind of goon-baiting, such as the time the prisoners put broken razor blades into the garbage to make sure that it could not be fed to the pigs. Virtually none of the senior prisoners condoned this type of goon-baiting and even took the German side whenever it was discovered. As Spivey pointed out, in addition to being barbaric, such actions served no good purpose and only jeopardized the few privileges the prisoners enjoyed. If provoked sufficiently, the Germans could cut off the

⁷Spivey, "History," 54.

prisoners' rations altogether, and in this respect they had the trump card.

As is usually the case, however, the prisoners were not the only ones to do things that created strained relations between the captors and their captives. It is quite clear that in many instances the prisoners' hostile attitudes stemmed less from the fact that the Germans were the enemy than they did from the actions of certain German personnel in camp. And the captives were angered not so much by the imposition of new rules as by the German practice of enforcing such rules before they had been announced to the prisoners. Too often it was a case of the guards being told to shoot prisoners for doing something the prisoners did not know was a punishable offense.

The worst German aggression was to shoot into the compound either at random or with the intent to kill. The prisoners understood and accepted the German practice of shooting at anyone who got too close to the wire, although they understandably protested the German refusal to fire a warning shot before taking aim to kill. But usually the men were shot near the wire only during escape attempts and they knew the risks involved before they set out for the fence. There also were instances where the Germans fired at prisoners who were retrieving a ball that rolled beyond the warning wire, and sometimes this occurred even after an individual had secured permission to cross the wire. But there is no evidence that the prisoners' lives were seriously endangered at such times since the shootings occurred in broad daylight and the available records tell of no one ever being injured in this way.

Far more serious were the acts of firing directly into the

compound either during the day or at night. The shootings usually came in conjunction with air raid alerts. When the siren sounded, the prisoners were supposed to move indoors immediately and remain there until the all-clear siren sounded. If the men did not seem to be moving fast enough, or even if they peered out the doors or windows in a way that was noticeable to the Germans, likely as not, a hail of bullets would be directed into the barracks. There were three such shooting incidents in South Compound alone, the first resulting in a severe wound, the second causing no injuries, and the third killing a man.

Around 8:30 p.m. on December 29, 1943, Lieutenant Colonel J. D. Stevenson was seriously wounded while sitting in his room. When an air raid alarm sounded at night, a warning signal was supposed to be given before the lights were extinguished. On this particular night the warning was not given, and after the lights were shut off, a German guard shot into the barracks area, reportedly at "some figures" moving outside the barrack in which Stevenson was sitting. The evidence suggests that there were no prisoners outside at that time, and especially not in the area in question, since it was definitely in a no-trespass zone for that time of the night and prisoners spotted there would have been shot at whether or not an alarm had sounded. Two shots were fired into the barracks, one of them passing through both of Stevenson's legs above the knee and breaking the bone in the left leg. The prisoners gathered evidence pertaining to the case and presented it to the Protecting Power, but no action seems to have been taken against the Germans other than asking for an official explanation.⁸

⁸For pertinent documents outlining both the prisoners' and German views on this incident, see Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Annex III, "Protecting Power File."

In late March 1944, two shots were fired into Block 130 late at night, fortunately hitting no one but passing directly through two rooms crowded with men. The prisoners asserted that again there was no plausible justification for the shooting, but the Germans alleged that a disturbance had been taking place at the window of the room in question. However, the prisoners insisted that nothing of the sort had taken place.⁹

On April 6, 1944, the prisoners in Stalag Luft III were told about the murders of fifty of the seventy-six men who escaped from North Compound on the night of March 24-25, 1944. They were stunned and dismayed beyond belief by the news. To the best of their knowledge, prisoners had never received anything more than a sentence to solitary confinement for escaping. It took the men some time to grasp the full meaning of what had happened.

Before long another incident occurred that left no doubt in their minds that German-prisoner relations had entered a new and much harsher phase. On Easter Sunday, April 9, 1944, Corporal C. C. Miles, U.S. Army, was shot dead inside South Compound where there was not even a remote possibility of his being engaged in an escape attempt. The report filed by the Senior American Officer described the tragic event in these words:

An air-raid alarm had been sounded . . . at about 1330 hours in the afternoon. The Prisoners had returned to their barracks according to the German Order. Those working in the Cookhouse, of which Cpl. Miles was one, remaining in that building. About 20 minutes elapsed after the Compound had thus been cleared.

⁹Ibid., Part I, Section 2B.

The day was clear and warm, windows and doors were open, Prisoners standing near the openings. The German guard, who later killed Cpl. Miles pointed his gun at several of these [prisoners standing near the open windows and doors] although no provocative act had been committed. Cpl. Miles, talking with two other Prisoners, was leaning against the doorway of the Cook-house, about 200 yards inside the barbed wire fence. He had stood thus for several minutes when, without warning, the guard was seen to aim and fire the shot that killed him.

The report goes on to say:

The local German authorities have stated that it was the duty of the guard to shoot Cpl. Miles because his body was not entirely inside the building.

No warning whatever was given that such a minor infringement of the rules would be punishable by shooting. In the past, during air-raids in daylight, no notice at all was taken [of] Prisoners standing in doorways or leaning out of windows.¹⁰

There is nothing in the available records to explain precisely why the Germans felt so strongly about keeping the prisoners tucked tightly inside the barracks during air raids. It is possible that the German administration was reacting to the fear of an arms drop by air and locked the prisoners in to make it more difficult for them to gain effective control of the weapons. It is also possible that they simply did not want the prisoners outside where they could gloat over the increasingly preponderant strength of the Allied Air Forces.

¹⁰Darr H. Alkire, Senior American Officer to The Secretary, Swiss Legation, Berlin, April 10, 1944, *Ibid.*, Annex III, "Protecting Power File." There is some evidence that the German guard actually shot into the ground near the prisoner and that the bullet ricocheted and killed him. The guard should not have shot that close to the prisoner if he was merely firing a warning shot, however. Interview with Albert P. Clark, April 15, 1976.

There might have been a question of safety involved, but this seems unlikely since no worthwhile targets existed in the immediate vicinity of the camp, other than the minor railroad interchange visible in the camp photographs. Perhaps the most plausible explanation comes from the prisoners themselves, who concluded that they had better exercise extreme caution during the air raids since "some of the guards in the 'goon boxes' had lost relatives and friends in air raids and, therefore, might be 'trigger happy.'"¹¹

Fortunately, the majority of the disagreements and misunderstandings between the prisoners and their jailers did not end in a shooting incident. Usually the battle was carried on with words rather than bullets, though the disputed issues themselves were important enough to warrant keen interest in the outcome. The Germans posted copies of the Geneva Convention all around the compounds, and the prisoners relied heavily upon the information given in them when arguing their case. The senior officers especially came to look upon the Convention as their bible, and could quote its articles chapter and verse. Sometimes it helped, sometimes it did not, but the mere existence of the Convention was an unending comfort to the prisoners.

Colonel Spivey seems to have best described the attitudes of the prisoners and the Germans toward the Geneva Convention:

As I read over the letters which I wrote to the commandant concerning the German violations of this treaty I marvel that the old man didn't put me in solitary confinement for the language used

¹¹Thomas E. Mulligan, Lyman B. Burbank, and Robert R. Brunn, "History of Center Compound, Stalag Luft III, Sagan Germany" (unpublished manuscript, 1945), Part I, Section 3a [Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Maxwell AFB, Alabama]. Hereinafter cited as "History of Center Compound."

in them. Sometimes they caused some action to be taken, most of the time nothing happened. I am sure that most of the Germans to whom I talked took great pride in the fact that American POWs were being treated in accordance with the provisions of the Convention. And I am even more certain that the treatment the German POWs in America [received] influenced them in their treatment of us. I had a faint recollection of what was in the treaty when I arrived in camp but I knew it by heart within two months after I arrived. There isn't the slightest doubt in my mind . . . we would have perished otherwise. I know of no other nationality, including Americans, so concerned with being regarded as honest (inherently honest) in all things as the Germans. If I ever wanted to taunt and anger any of my captors all I had to do was to refer in an offhand manner to his dishonesty. Immediately he would flare up and down . . . with a gush of German reminiscent of Hitler's tirades. And what is more they were honest in all things except those pertaining to the Fatherland. Anything was excusable if committed in its name. It made no difference whether it was the breaking of a solemn treaty or the liquidation of all the Jews or the . . . starving of a couple of million Russians or denying a lowly POW a replacement of his one and only eating utensil which he had accidentally broken. These same people, who could do all the above things without batting an eye, delivered Red Cross food and supplies to us when they themselves were hungry and when their transportation system was taxed to the breaking point to sustain their war effort, all because it was a part of their code of honor and because an order said to do it.¹²

These attitudes influenced German actions, mannerisms, and practices around camp that related directly, indirectly, or not at all to the Convention. For example, most of the prisoners were very favorably impressed by the high state of discipline among the Germans who worked in and around the camp. They were also struck by the will power demonstrated by those Germans who had opportunities to steal

¹²Spivey, "History," 54-56.

but did not. One of the prisoners who worked in the Red Cross clothing store wrote:

It has always been amazing to me that there we were with all that clothing in the midst of an area where the people had no opportunity to get new clothing or soap for several years, yet despite the obvious temptation . . . I know of no instance in which there was any thievery by any of the Germans. Whether this was due to any moral compulsion or was prompted by fear of punishment I do not know Many a time in taking inventory I would see old Heindricks [a German] almost lovingly handle the toilet soap or shaving cream. The Lord only knows what the Germans used.¹³

There were cases where property belonging to the prisoners was stolen, but in many instances it could not be proved that the Germans were the thieves, nor did the losses occur frequently enough to warrant much concern.¹⁴

The Germans were also punctilious when it came to observing military customs and traditions. The Geneva Convention states that prisoners must salute all officers of higher rank that belong to the armed forces of the detaining power, and the Germans became very upset when the prisoners ignored this custom. Actually, the prisoners had an alibi since it is considered improper for a soldier to salute outdoors unless he is wearing a hat. This set the stage for some comic scenes. As one prisoner recalled:

Whenever von Lindeiner came into the compound, the bare-headed prisoners who passed him would

¹³John J. Lee to Delmar T. Spivey, February 27, 1948, "Red Cross Clothing Store" Folder, Spivey Collection.

¹⁴See Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part I, Section 1h, for examples of thievery by the Germans.

nod politely, and the impeccable Prussian would salute the scruffy prisoner who, like as not, had a great hole in the seat of his pants and a two days' stubble because he'd been using the same razor blade for a month.¹⁵

Saluting became a potential bombshell right after the July 1944 attempt on Hitler's life. Shortly thereafter the Heil Hitler party salute became mandatory in Germany and replaced the regular military salute. When the camp staff at Sagan tried to force the prisoners to recognize the salute, trouble threatened. After much discussion the senior American officers decided that discretion was the better part of valor and agreed to acknowledge the party salute. The British flatly refused and after three days were greeted by a military salute from their lager officers. The Germans apparently concluded that the party salute was compulsory between Germans but that it was an individual matter when saluting prisoners of war.¹⁶

There was always the question of what the Germans could or would do when the prisoners misbehaved. What the prisoners feared most was the possibility that the Gestapo would be brought into the camp. And whenever the atmosphere in camp became too tense the senior officers cautioned the prisoners to exercise extreme care at all times. After the fifty prisoners from North Compound were killed Colonel Spivey sent word around to all his men reminding them that:

We are approaching the critical period in our captivity and the first signs are already evident that the Geneva Convention may mean far less than it has so far, and may possibly be

¹⁵Brickhill, The Great Escape, 66.

¹⁶Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part III (Diary), July 25, 1944.

totally disregarded.

From all the information available, it seems clear that the Gestapo will be inclined to assume greater control over all POW activities, probably in a supervisory capacity at first, but tending gradually to increase to the extent of taking over entire control of the camp.

. . . in order to insure, as far as is within our power, the safety of the personnel in this camp from the consequences of Gestapo control, it is absolutely essential that every possibility of an incident be avoided.

I want everyone to realize the fact that one individual, through momentary lack of self control or disobedience to orders, may be responsible for bringing the full Gestapo attention to these camps - with all that that entails.¹⁷

Short of bringing in the Gestapo, the Germans were not above initiating reprisals against the prisoners in other ways. The most frequent form of reprisal was to deprive all the prisoners in a compound, or even in the entire camp, of certain "privileges," such as entering the Vorlager to take showers. More frequently they would deny the prisoners access to their theaters, or prohibit inter-compound visits and sports competition. One action the Germans took which had a depressing effect on the prisoners was to curtail the number of parole walks. It is not known whether the walks were allowed so infrequently as a punishment or because the Germans simply did not have enough guards to accompany the men on their walks. Whatever the reason, the prisoners longed for strolls outside the barbed wire fence and felt that the Germans were cruel for not granting them more often. When a walk was announced, the prisoners themselves decided who would go and chose men according to the date on which they were shot down so that those who had been confined the longest would be granted walks

¹⁷Ibid., Part I, Section 3B.

first. The list grew longer and longer until by September 1944 an eighteen-month waiting list had accumulated.¹⁸

Prisoners could also be punished individually, either as a result of court martial or merely by order of the Kommandant. Actions for which prisoners could be court martialed included:

All acts directed against the body or life of men or causing damage to the war effort.

Damaging or destroying buildings or barracks i.e. the breaking of walls, floors, etc.

Destroying, damaging or stealing of barrack installations, i.e. bed boards for tunneling purposes, damaging the lighting system, cutting blankets, bed clothes, and towels, etc.

Altering of uniforms not the personal property of P.O.W.s.

Theft of tools, raw materials, and unauthorized use of electric light for building tunnels, etc.

Forging or stealing of passes, etc.

Disguising oneself as a member of the German army or in civilian clothes in an attempt to escape.¹⁹

Court martials were seldom carried out, however, and when they were the sentences were usually postponed.

Most often the disciplinary action consisted of assigning the offender to the "cooler" for a limited time that rarely extended beyond two weeks. One might suspect that ordinarily the prisoners would dread being sent into the cells because of the close confinement and relative isolation involved. According to Simoleit, however, frequently just the opposite was true. In discussing the problems

¹⁸ Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 2C.

¹⁹ Kommandant to Senior American and British Officers, October 6, 1943, Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part I, Section 3B.

faced by the German administrators at Sagan, he noted:

According to the Geneva Convention, our commandant had . . . disciplinary power over all prisoners. For disobedience, disorderly behavior or violation of camp orders he could put them under arrest. But this system of punishment did not work at all. Prisoners who were tired of the uneasy life in the overcrowded barracks were often happy to pass a few peaceful, undisturbed days alone in the arrest room. Others regarded such 'punishment' as an honour. It was a proof that they had been active in some way against the German 'enemies.' The demand for arrest became so urgent and numerous that the arrest rooms were sold out for many months in advance. At last we were forced to declare that no 'bad boys' could hope to be put under arrest.²⁰

There were times when the prisoners and the Germans got along very well together. Quite frequently the meetings in the Kommandant's office were conducted on a friendly basis with a mutual concern for the state of affairs in the compounds serving as the bond between the participants. And on many occasions members of the German staff were invited into the compounds by the prisoners to attend opening night presentations of plays and musical concerts as well as major sports events. But relations at this level were still considered "official" in that they were open and above board for all to see and know about. Furthermore, they were engaged in only by the senior staff members on both sides. Something of quite a different nature occurred in terms of "unofficial" relations between the prisoners and the rank and file of the German personnel.

²⁰Gustav Simoleit, "Organization and Administration of the Prisoner of War Camp No. III of the Air Force," unpublished manuscript enclosed in Simoleit to Delmar T. Spivey, December 19, 1968, Simoleit Folder, Spivey Collection. Hereinafter cited as "Organization and Administration."

To most of the men in camp, the guards and the Germans who worked in the compounds were a curiosity and a nuisance in an exclusively British and American environment. Established policy dictated that the prisoners were not to converse with the Germans and vice versa. However, there were violations of this rule on both sides, particularly among those Germans who spoke fluent English. Sometimes various Germans would stop to visit with a prisoner "friend" or two, usually just for conversation or to pick up a cigarette or drink some coffee. The senior officers frowned upon prisoners who encouraged Germans to visit them unless the prisoner was acting as a "contact," the name given those men who were able to obtain information and forbidden goods from certain Germans.²¹

It should perhaps be pointed out, however, that these meetings could be dangerous to both sides and one must assume that the Germans seeking contact with the prisoners were oftentimes interested in far more than personal gratifications. The conversations with the prisoners provided an excellent opportunity for the German administration to obtain information that might give them clues concerning escape activities or simply to help them keep their ear to the ground on what was going on inside the compounds. Because so much could be said or transpire in a few unguarded moments uncontrolled fraternization was discouraged at all times by both sides.

Relations Among the Prisoners

German-prisoner relations were important in the lives of the

²¹More will be said about the work of contact men in chapter XI which deals with camp intelligence activities.

prisoners, but no more so than relations among the prisoners themselves. Much information about the feelings and attitudes the prisoners held toward one another has already been revealed in previous discussions about their activities. Two components of their administrative system that have not been mentioned, but which serve to increase our understanding of prisoner relations, are the ways in which they handled their financial affairs and the relationship that existed among the officers and men in the camp.

Community Financial Concerns

There was an obvious inequity in the distribution of financial resources to prisoners of war in World War II in that officers received monthly payments from the detaining power while the NCOs and men did not. This disparity had its origin in times past when an officer was expected to pay for his own living expenses while a prisoner of war. Since he usually relied upon a monthly salary to help him meet his obligations, arrangements were generally made for an officer to receive pay from his own government while in the hands of the enemy. The difficulty of getting funds to an officer in enemy hands led to provisions in international law that permitted private arrangements between belligerents whereby the detaining power would pay the prisoner the same as if he were one of their own soldiers and be reimbursed by the prisoner's government after the war. The Geneva Convention of 1929 endorsed this system, and the belligerents in World War II concluded separate agreements providing for payments to officers by the detaining power with the understanding that the necessary

reimbursements would be made when hostilities ended.²² The inequity developed when the detaining powers assumed the major burden of support for both officers and men. This practice left the officers with surplus funds with which to buy on the local market such goods as additional tobacco products, toiletries, and any other items the detaining power would allow them to have in the camps to make their lives more comfortable.

The disparity would not have been so pronounced if all the other ranks had worked outside the camps and received pay for their labor (as is allowed by the Geneva Convention), for at least then they would have had some money for their own use. As it was, NCOs, like officers, could not be forced to work except in supervisory capacities and their opportunities to earn money thus depended upon the availability of enlisted men who could be sent out on work details. Since Air Force personnel could not fly combat missions until they had attained NCO rank, however, there were no enlisted prisoners for the Air Force NCOs to supervise, and there was thus little or no chance for them to acquire funds for their own personal use.

The Allied Air Force officers were keenly aware of the opportunities this inequity provided the Germans in terms of inciting discontent among the Air Force NCOs that lived in the vicinity of the officers. The officers also felt a moral obligation to aid their less fortunate subordinates. Thus while still at Barth the officers

²² Herbert C. Fooks, Prisoners of War (Federalsburg, Maryland: The J. W. Stowell Printing Co., 1924), 206; Article 23, Geneva Convention of July 27, 1929, Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, Treaty Series No. 846 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1932), 44.

donated one-third of their monthly pay to a communal fund, part of which was made available to the NCOs through periodic grants to the NCO Man of Confidence for the prisoners' general needs as well as through loans to individual NCOs.²³

The communal fund was continued when the prisoners moved to Stalag Luft III. The money raised there was used to help various groups of prisoners, among which were:

NCOs at:	RMs
Stalag Luft III	98222.16
Stalag Luft I	34600.00
Dulag Luft	26680.00
Stalag VIIIIB	23200.00
Stalag IXC	9440.00
Stalag VIIA	10760.00
The British Wounded Party	21467.00
Military Hospital, Stadtroda	1360.00
Military Hospital, Obermassfeld	860.00
Goods supplied Oflag XXIB	3788.92
Royal Merchant Navy, Milag and Marlag Nord	3240.00
British Party ex Channel Islands	11440.00
Middle Mountains Sanatorium	1000.00
Grants to families of Allied Officers	74400.00
Grants to families of Allied Sergeants	51883.30
French Hospital Near Stalag Luft III	2130.00
Russian POWs, Stalag Luft III	1530.00
	RM 37,5951.38

At the time these funds were donated, the officers were receiving the following monthly payments:

²³Unless otherwise stated, the information given in this section is extracted from the following: C. G. Goodrich to the Chief of the Army Air Force, Washington through George Tait, First Secretary, American Legation, Bern to the Secretary of State, Washington, August 2, 1943, File No. 711.62114A/21 ["United States Prisoners of War Detained by Germany"], Record Group 59 [Diplomatic Branch, National Archives]; "Financial Policy of Stalag Luft III," enclosed in Howard Buckness, Jr., Minister-Counselor, Embassy of the United States, London, to the Secretary of State, Washington, May 30, 1944, File No. 711.62114A/637, Record Group 59.

First and Second Lieutenants	50 RM
Captains	75 RM
Majors and up	100 RM

At that time one Reichsmark was equal to forty cents in American money at the exchange rate of two and one-half Reichsmarks to one American dollar.²⁴

Money from the communal fund also was used to purchase numerous items on the German market for the officer prisoners, to pay for damage to German property, and to meet other miscellaneous costs. Among the categories of goods and services paid for out of the communal fund were:

- Services of orderlies
- Entertainment supplies
- Sports equipment
- Library materials
- Education supplies
- Sundries (plaques, ash trays for sports awards, etc.)
- Office and Administration costs
- Medical supplies
- Damages to Reich property
- Newspapers and periodicals
- Air Ministry property
- Church supplies
- Photographs
- Mail letter forms
- Beer
- Matches
- Cigarettes, tobacco, etc.
- Toothbrushes, razor blades, etc.
- Cleaning and washing materials
- Food, seeds, and plants
- Crockery
- Clothing, insoles, etc.
- Shoe polish

The damage charges were always disputed by the prisoners who objected

²⁴"Pay and Correspondence of American Prisoners of War," "Dulag Luft" Folder, "Camps Reports-Germany-Air Force Transit Camps" File [Office of the Provost Marshall General], Record Group 389, [Modern Military Branch, National Archives].

to the German practice of adding fifty per cent to each bill as a "willful damage" charge, but the Germans consistently deducted the disputed amount from the prisoners' monthly pay.

Many of the above items went into the compound canteens and were distributed to the prisoners without charge through the block canteen officers. This practice worked especially well in Stalag Luft III where there were always a number of NCOs and enlisted men in the same compounds with the officers (in addition to those who were housed separately in Center when it was an NCO compound). The communal fund rounded out the community sharing system adopted by the prisoners because it admirably complemented the automatic distribution of supplies through the Red Cross Parcels Store, the Red Cross Clothing Store, and the Y.M.C.A. Store.

The canteen in particular illustrated the extent to which the community spirit prevailed in Stalag Luft III. The officers donated to the communal fund on a voluntary basis²⁵ with the hope, but without any assurance, that they would someday be reimbursed for their expenses. When queries were sent to the respective Allied governments, the prisoners were told that all Americans who became prisoners still continued to have their full pay (minus allotments) sent directly to the bank for them in the States, but that British prisoners had an amount equivalent to the German monthly payments deducted from their checks before the money was sent to the bank for them. Again an inequity in the system became apparent, and again the prisoners responded

²⁵All Americans contributed but about a dozen British prisoners exercised their option not to donate funds.

by juggling their finances, the Americans agreeing to pay for all canteen purchases so that the British would not have to lose part of their monthly payments.²⁶

With several important exceptions, the relationship that existed between the officers and men in Stalag Luft III was about the same as that found in most military organizations. The primary differences were that at Sagan the officers greatly outnumbered the men, and that the issue of physical labor created some difficulties because NCOs usually comprised the lowest Air Force rank in the camps and traditionally they were responsible for supervisory and not manual labor.²⁷

Article twenty-two of the Geneva Convention authorizes the presence of orderlies in officers' camps, and the officers in Stalag Luft III asked for their services. The British and Americans apparently followed different practices in relation to the orderlies. The British officers expected their orderlies to take good care of them, make their beds, launder their clothes, and do the necessary cleanup work around the camp.²⁸ The Americans demanded much less of them,

²⁶No information was available in the documents researched for this study concerning the final settlements between the United States and Germany in regard to the payments made to the prisoners. For more information on funds owed the prisoners by spring 1945 see Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3B(7). See also Walter Rundell, Jr., "Paying the POW in World War II," Military Affairs, 22 (Fall, 1958), 121-34.

²⁷Personnel in the Air Force had to attain NCO rank before they could fly combat missions. There were, however, instances when Air Force men of lower rank were captured when airfields were overrun and in other unusual circumstances.

²⁸Interview with Albert P. Clark, November 7, 1975; Sydney Smith, Mission Escape (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1968), 68. Smith says that the British orderlies were known as "Batmen" until Wings ordered a name change at Barth specifying that henceforth they would be called orderlies. He also directed that the officers should

and assigned them duties primarily in the compound kitchens and on general cleanup details. It appears that each compound differed somewhat in this regard. For example, in North Compound, where about 500 Americans were housed again during the fall of 1944, the orderlies who worked in the kitchen were expected to carry water to the officers in their barracks whereas in Center and South Compounds this task appears to have been done by the officers themselves.²⁹ In Center and South Compounds the orderlies were expected to clean the night latrines each day. It was this task which incited the one known case of insubordination in Center Compound. The night latrines were particularly inadequate, consisting of only two buckets. Eighty to 120 men had to use them all night long, and there were always some who were sick. By morning the rooms gave off a choking odor and displayed a stomach-churning mess. A few NCOs took the position that the officers made the mess and they should clean it up. Colonel Spivey decided that more was involved than merely the cleaning of latrines. So he ordered some of the officers to do their part in keeping the night latrines halfway clean and at the same time dealt sternly with the NCOs. The entry for July 6, 1944 in the Center Compound Diary reads:

An issue regarding work details to be performed by the enlisted men blew wide [open] today when a sergeant told Colonel Spivey he would not work because the officers did not work. He made the statement shortly after appell and by 1100 hours the Colonel had ordered all enlisted men and the camp staff to meet in the camp theatre.

make their own beds. The orderlies' duties are not known to the author, but Clark states that they were very busy men in East Compound when he arrived in August 1942.

²⁹Donald G. Charland to author, May 8, 1975.

The enlisted men joked and made unsoldierly comment on the "no work" strike, wondering how far they could get with it.

The men stood at attention when the Colonel entered. Colonel Spivey said, "Be seated gentlemen," and as soon as the squeaking of chairs had stopped, he continued. "Is there any man in this auditorium who is not a citizen of the United States and has not pledged allegiance to the United States and obedience to his commanding officer? Until someone replaces me and as long as I am Senior Officer of this camp, my orders will be obeyed. If there is any man in this auditorium who believes differently he will keep his seat. The rest are dismissed.

In twenty seconds the theatre was empty.

Four days later, the enlisted men proposed to work for a salary at the rate of 200 Reichsmarks for eight-man rooms and 100 Reichsmarks for four-man rooms. Colonel Spivey denied their request.

Such discontent seems to have been unusual because most NCOs were only too happy to be in the camp where they could share in the relatively better conditions enjoyed by the officers.³⁰ Their presence was not to be taken for granted, for the officers had to go through considerable trouble to obtain orderlies in the first place. Until October 1943 only British orderlies were available in the camp, and a number of them offered their services to the Americans. In October the British orderlies were reassigned to the British compounds as a result of the arrival of several hundred American ground force orderlies. The ground force personnel were allowed to remain until the fall of 1944 when they too were transferred out and in a few weeks replaced

³⁰Unless otherwise specified, the information presented here on orderlies has been extracted from Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3B(18) and Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part I, Section 3c.

by American Air Force NCOs.

An incident involving the army personnel again reveals the ability of the prisoners to join forces to frustrate the wishes of the enemy. At one point the Germans threatened to remove more than half of the army orderlies from Center Compound, claiming that they were in fact privates and should therefore be on work details outside the camp. Spivey interviewed the orderlies and found that at least a third and probably more of them were in fact privates who had pinned on higher rank just prior to capture precisely to avoid the work camps. He then took their identification cards and initialed them in the proper space, thereby promoting all of them on the spot. It also says something about German-prisoner relations in Stalag Luft III that the Kommandant seemed perfectly satisfied with this procedure and did not remove any of the army personnel because of their rank.³¹

In Center Compound the orderlies lived in a separate barrack and were supervised by an officer who had served in the enlisted ranks prior to receiving his commission. In North, South, and West Compounds the orderlies were divided up, a group living in one room in each of the barracks. In all other respects the orderlies and officers shared their facilities. The NCOs played in the officers' sports league with their team usually performing extremely well in all major competitions. They also participated on an equal basis in all theater, music, religious, and education programs. Their work details required only about three hours a day and thus left them plenty of time for such activities.

³¹Spivey, "History," 90.

Contrary to the impression given in one of the novels written about life in Stalag Luft III, there appears to have been little if any racial strife. Len Giovannitti's The Prisoners of Combine D has many strong points, especially in terms of portraying what it must have been like to live in one room for an extended period of time, all the while searching for relief from the monotony of seeing the same faces and hearing the same voices and following the same routine, but he does a grave disservice to the men who lived in Stalag Luft III to represent them as Southern "Nigger haters" and "Jew baiters."³² No statistics are available on how many blacks or Jews there were in Stalag Luft III. The Center Compound diary indicates that on July 9, 1944 two blacks arrived from Italy, the entry ending with the crypt comment "good impression on camp." Again, the fact that they were fliers means that they were well-educated and highly trained, all of which may have helped them be better accepted than they might have been under other circumstances. As for the Jews, there seems to have been a concerted effort to help them conceal their identity and make their presence as inconspicuous as possible. Either this effort was successful or else the Germans simply decided not to bother the Jews in Stalag Luft III, for the records indicate that none was ever removed from the camp. In fact, other than the Jew mentioned earlier who died as a result of injuries when he tried to escape from a train, the only Jew who died in the camp was a man suffering from pneumonia who, at the time of his death, was in a German hospital under an

³² Len Giovannitti, The Prisoners of Combine D (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1957), passim.

oxygen tent.³³

There were, however, numerous times when the community spirit and veneer of civilization wore thin. It would be too much to expect the prisoners not to have engaged in familial strife. The seeming callousness demonstrated in the block kitchens when men removed others' half-cooked food and placed their own pots on the burner and the problems with a few of the orderlies have already been mentioned. A very frequent source of discontent was the distribution system for the various supplies, with charges of "rackets" coming more and more frequently as less and less goods were available to be divided among more and more men.

After months of grumbling by the prisoners of Center Compound, Colonel Spivey called a special meeting in July 1944 to determine if there was negligence in performing camp duties, if there was profiteering in jobs dealing with communal property, and if any effective measures could be taken to ease the men's minds on these matters. The chief complaints were that meat from the kitchen was not distributed equally, that parole walks were oftentimes taken by a "certain few," and that some blocks had not received communal phonographs in many months. The editor of the compound newspaper had apparently done some investigative reporting, as he was asked to be more specific about certain insinuations made in the newspaper. The conclusion drawn at the meeting was that the majority of complaints could be attributed to the fact that the men were getting restless and short-tempered.³⁴

³³Confidential interviews with former prisoners, April 19, 1975.

³⁴Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part III (Diary), July 25, 1944.

Yet another source of irritation among the prisoners was the different attitudes of the old versus the new prisoners. The prisoners who had been in camp for some time felt that they had done most of the work required to set up the community and felt they should be able to enjoy the fruits of their labor. The new man often criticized the way things were done and wanted to do everything their own way. The older men were less optimistic about the future since they had been captured when Germany was riding the tide of victory. The new men were brash and insolent and, at first, infinitely confident about the outcome of the war. They felt it would end quickly and did not understand why the older prisoners were so concerned about setting food aside for emergencies. The old and new prisoners could hardly communicate at times. Talk of Halifaxes and B-24 Liberators meant little to the older prisoners—they had never seen either one. The more recent arrivals talked about new hit songs and movies and battlefronts that were all unfamiliar to the older men. The Center Compound Diary reads for July 7, 1944: "New men immature, seem spoiled, unappreciative for the most part."

Even the new prisoners, however, soon realized that things had to be done a certain way in prison camps. Furthermore, most of the prisoners tried very hard to be tolerant of each other's peculiar habits and personality traits. There seemed to be a common understanding among the men that as long as everyone had to live so close together for an undetermined length of time, they had best be as civil and compassionate toward one another as possible.

But sometimes the unending routine, crowded conditions, scarcity of materials, and over-familiarity with one's roommates got on the

prisoners' nerves. The fact that a man usually lived in one room for the duration was enough in itself to tax even the most patient prisoners. As one observer put it, "Each room was kitchen, mess hall, lounge, library, and bedroom, all in one, and all at once!"³⁵ Then there were the uncertainties about the future to contend with—would there be enough food, would the Gestapo take over the camp, would the invasion of the mainland ever come, would the latest offensive get bogged down, did the Germans really have a new secret weapon, how much mail would come tomorrow, was the family getting along all right, and would the war ever come to an end? These and other thoughts continually gnawed away at the prisoners' peace of mind and added to their general feeling of irritability. It is in regard to the men's daily routine and inner thoughts that the novels³⁶ about life in Stalag Luft III prove far superior to the image fostered in the "Hogan's Heroes" stereotype. The latter depiction ignores the boredom of it all, the worries, the doubts, and the fears that made the young men in their early twenties grow old before their time. But we read in one of the novels:

The bed boards groaned as Lawton rolled over on his back. The noise of more than a hundred

³⁵Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3B(3).

³⁶There are only two novels published in America that use Stalag Luft III as the primary setting. They are Len Giovannitti, The Prisoners of Combine D (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1957), hereinafter cited as The Prisoners, and Kenneth W. Simmons, Kriegle (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1960). A third novel, Maybe I'm Dead by Joe Klaas (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955) makes many references to what life was like in the camp, but deals primarily with the winter march westward in late January 1945. More will be said about Klaas' work in Chapter XIII.

voices talking simultaneously had aroused him from his early evening nap. Out of habit, he raised himself and looked around the barracks with an appraising eye

Below, to his right, the members of his own combine were sitting at the bare, rectangular table playing pinochle. Cigarette smoke hung above their heads like a dead cloud. On his left, Fernandez was standing over the wooden sink drying the last of the dinner dishes. All six cups were neatly lined up on the shelf. So far everything was in order.

After describing the general arrangement of the combines, the author continues:

In most of the combines card games were in progress and the slap of the cards added to the noise of conversation. Some men were lying on their bunks reading pocket books or sleeping; others were gathered in small groups intently discussing food, sex, and the war—the only topics of interest to the prisoners.

Lawton relaxed again on his back. The thick, smoky air irritated his eyes. He wondered how long it was until lights out. If they didn't shut the lights [off] and open the shutters he felt he'd suffocate. What time was it anyway? He wished he had a watch. The nights were so damn long in Germany, much longer than in the States or Italy. It was always night in this country. How many nights had he been a prisoner? He looked up at the ceiling four feet above his bunk. A square section of the ceiling was covered with red pencil marks. He counted them, his lips forming the numbers

He took a red pencil from his pocket and marked a new line. May 13, 1944. Two hundred and nineteen nights. Long German nights. He wondered if he would be free before the entire ceiling was covered with red marks. The thought made him smile. At least he would know the day. A man had to know his place in time or he might as well be dead. The last red mark was Lawton's place.

Finally the long awaited notice from the block commander came saying the lights would be extinguished in five minutes.

Instantly the large room was filled with the sounds of one hundred and fifty men scurrying to undress and get into bed. Lawton listened to the bed boards creak as their bodies sank onto the hard paillasses. Did the beds at home creak so loudly? After the lights went out, the prisoners slammed open the window [blackout] shutters and fastened them to the outside wall of the barracks. The cigarette smoke drifted out into the night. A breeze blew through the room, rustling the cards and papers on the tables. Does there always have to be noise? A few men still stumbled clumsily about in the dark, swearing from time to time as they collided with a chair or table.

A fresh breeze swept through the building carrying the putrid odor of the latrine with it. Lawton leaned over the edge of his bunk and looked out the window. The barbed-wire fence reflected the light of the tower searchlight as it swept over the compound. When the beam flashed past the window, Lawton began counting to himself . . . one, two, three, four, five . . . The beam flashed again. Five seconds. Right on schedule. Every five seconds, twelve hours a night for two hundred and nineteen nights. He began to calculate the number of flashes since he became a prisoner. After a moment he stopped. Jesus Christ! He clenched his hands. He wanted a gun to shoot out the searchlight. Anything to stop the endless routine.³⁷

The routine took its toll. But in most cases the men managed to keep their sense of humor about what was happening to them, even to the point of joking about their short tempers. There were the "old Kriegie arguments," which one observant prisoner described as "a positive statement of fact, followed by a categorical denial, followed by a personal insult, followed by complete silence."³⁸ If the

³⁷Giovannitti, The Prisoners, 8-10.

³⁸Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part I, Section 1A.

disagreement went any further than that it would not be long before someone down the hall would cry out "big flap in room fourteen," and like a bunch of school boys looking for an excuse not to study for exams, the prisoners in the block would go flocking down to the room and join in the commotion in search of a little diversion in their dull lives.³⁹

The prisoners seem to have recognized various stages of barbed wire psychosis in themselves and others, the mildest forms consisting of nothing more than an increasing inability to concentrate, the worst cases being actual insanity. When someone began to act strangely, the others said he was "going around the bend." One study summarizes the symptoms:

They get tired of seeing the same "damn faces" every morning and night. Men who have been very good friends may quarrel or fight over small matters which later seem meaningless. Men either become sullen and dull or "blow their top" in an effort to relieve the pressure. They often lose their perspective and fail to understand ordinary procedures. They develop a mild form of mania for talk or endless chatter about anything. One of the most common symptoms among prisoners in this stage is the daily complaint of "brain fag" and the inability to concentrate for any length of time. This may manifest itself in a constant getting up and sitting down in the midst of a meal, a theatrical production or group discussions. Every prisoner finds his memory fails him in some way. He cannot remember dates, names, streets, addresses or his own phone number in his home. The past seems to fade out and there is only the present. Often as a matter of banter one prisoner asks another if he knows his first or middle name this morning. The usual reply is,

³⁹For more details on the context of such incidents, see R.W. Kimball and O. M. Chiesl, Clipped Wings (n.p., by the author, n.d.), passim.

"Well, as long as I know my first name, I'll get by another day." These tests for "Stir Graze" may assume all forms and varieties. Connected with "Brain Fag" is a feeling of physical exhaustion and a need for more sleep. Prisoners are often more tired when they wake up in the morning than when they go to sleep. Some prisoners complain of defective eyesight, hearing and of smell. During this period they often misinterpret their actions. Unless the tension is relieved intense hatred develops against some person either among the prisoners or the guards.⁴⁰

Although very few individuals suffered complete insanity while in the camp, the conditions which brought it on undoubtedly worked havoc in the lives of everyone, and the prisoners were wary of even the lesser degrees of barbed wire psychosis. If only one man in a room began to "go round the bend," everybody in the room suffered. Prisoner relations could not help but be adversely affected by the abnormal behavior exhibited by the victims. Everything possible had to be done to prevent its occurrence. An article in the September 3, 1944 edition of the Klarion, a newspaper published in West Compound, listed the following recommendations for keeping oneself mentally fit.

Set a study program that you will follow each day for at least two weeks, regardless—and what better way could you find to get a head start on that career you had to interrupt because of war?

Take part in all sports you possibly can—volleyball, softball, swimming, the bar, boxing, weight lifting: (Kriegie brew is verboten).

If you get the blues, get out and try to cheer someone else up. You'll find it's very easy to laugh.

If mechanically minded, invent a 'Kriegie Klim Kan Kontraption' that will help make your housework easier. Why have a tired back after a big day's wash?

⁴⁰Walter A. Lunden, "Captivity Psychosis Among Prisoners of War," Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology, 39 (March-April 1949), 731.

Meet and talk to someone new each day.
'Monkeys is the cwaziest people.'⁴¹

Most of the prisoners instinctively followed this advice. Perhaps that is why the instances of barbed wire psychosis were so few. Whatever the reasons, the strain in prisoner relations brought on by this disease or by any other source was never sufficient to overshadow the sense of cooperation and sharing that prevailed among the vast majority of prisoners. As Colon Spivey noted, "it was extraordinary for people to be generous when they had so little and didn't know where they were going to get the next."⁴² And yet the prisoners did share, and overall got along together very well.

⁴¹Quoted in Kimball and Chiesl, Clipped Wings, n.p.

⁴²Spivey, "History," 60.

CHAPTER X

THE BRIGHTER SIDE OF LIFE

Introduction

Life in Stalag Luft III also had its bright side. A wide range of activities and pursuits was available to the prisoners, and most of the men took advantage of the opportunities offered them. Visitors to the camp were impressed by the extensive religious, educational, cultural, and athletic programs found in each of the compounds. All this was possible for several reasons. The prisoners in Stalag Luft III were mostly officers, and according to the Geneva Convention they could not be forced to work. This made it possible and even necessary for them to arrange numerous leisure time activities. Visitors observed that the prisoners in Stalag Luft III represented a physical and intellectual elite.¹ They thus possessed the talent and inclination to develop their resources to the fullest. The prisoners themselves frequently expressed surprise at the amount of talent and initiative displayed by the men in camp. Many of them were college graduates, most had traveled widely, and a number of them had practiced one or more professions.

¹See for example, Report concerning a visit made on September 13, 1942 by J. E. Friedrichs, representative of the International Red Cross, File No. 740.00114EW/3049 ["Prisoners of War-European War, 1939"], Record Group 59 [Diplomatic Branch, National Archives].

The materials the prisoners needed for their activities came primarily from the Y.M.C.A., with the Germans contributing little more than the buildings already described. Nevertheless, the Germans again deserve credit for giving the prisoners a certain amount of latitude in developing their own programs and for allowing others to lend material aid which would not have been available from German sources.

Religion and Morals

In time of danger or great need, people frequently express a renewed interest in religion and matters of faith and morals. The record clearly suggests that this was the case at Sagan. Many of the prisoners found the atmosphere conducive to religious growth and moral development. They had plenty of time to think about themselves—how they had lived in the past, and what they might do with their lives during and after their release from captivity. Those that held strong beliefs before capture were relieved to find that religious services were provided in camp for Roman Catholics, Protestants, Christian Scientists, and Mormons. Others, for whom religion had not been important, found their interest kindled for the first time. Whatever the origin or basis for their beliefs, it is evident that religion played an important role in the lives of many prisoners and that the particular circumstances in which they lived and worshipped seemed to add a deeper meaning and significance to their practices.²

²For a concise statement of a similar experience in the Vietnam War, see Robinson Risner, The Passing of the Night: My Seven Years as a Prisoner of the North Vietnamese (New York: Ballantine Books, A Division of Random House, Inc., 1975), passim.

Church services and religion classes were usually held in the compound theaters or in rooms used for classes or other public gatherings. The Y.M.C.A. offered to send the necessary materials from Sweden for a chapel, but the project never reached fruition. Most of the accoutrements were contributed either by the Y.M.C.A. or other religious organizations outside Germany. The furnishings were simple, but invariably included altars, altar cloths, candles, and Stations of the Cross. The clergymen wore the customary vestments. Frequently, a harmonium was available. Hymnbooks, prayer books, and rosary beads were scarce, as were Bibles, but efforts were made to obtain a copy for anyone who desired a Bible for his own use.³

The chaplains ministered to large congregations. There were seven or eight clergymen in the camp by late 1944 and they represented numerous denominations. Whenever possible they served members of their respective churches in more than one compound. In referring to the active pace imposed upon the clergymen, Colonel Spivey noted that

³Unless otherwise specified, the information presented in this section is taken from the following: Chaplain's Reports, especially those dated January 11, 1943, June 9, 1944, July 7, 1944, July 18, 1944, September 29, 1944, and December 4, 1944, "History" Folder, "Stalag Luft III" File, "Prisoner of War" Drawer, Research Division, Air Force Museum, Wright Patterson AFB, Ohio; Charles G. Goodrich, "History of the USAAF, Prisoners of War of the South Compound, Stalag Luft III" (unpublished manuscript, 1945), Part I, Section 3A(5) [Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Maxwell AFB, Alabama], hereinafter cited as "History of South Compound"; Thomas E. Mulligan, Lyman B. Burbank, and Robert R. Brunn, "History of Center Compound, Stalag Luft III, Sagan Germany" (unpublished manuscript, 1945), Part I, Section 2A [Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Maxwell AFB, Alabama], hereinafter cited as "History of Center Compound."

one priest "used to preach in east before reveille, in center right after breakfast, in north at eleven, in east in the afternoon, and center again at night."⁴ Until the early summer of 1944, the chaplains were able to visit the various compounds almost at will. After that time, however, their movements were closely controlled. One American chaplain in Center Compound was refused a pass because he was considered "politically unreliable," and was allowed to go to South and West Compounds only when accompanied by a guard.⁵

Attendance at services seems to have varied tremendously. One report indicates that in May 1943 attendance was "very low."⁶ A more specific account states that in East Compound in January 1943 about 150 officers out of a total of 650 regularly attended Church of England services and that an additional sixty men attended Roman Catholic services.⁷ In Center Compound attendance was reported to be good, and limited only by the small size of the auditorium.⁸ Padre

⁴Delmar T. Spivey, "History of Center Compound" (unpublished manuscript, 1946), 76, Spivey Collection [Special Collections Room, USAF Academy Library, Colorado]. Hereinafter cited as "History."

⁵Protecting Power Report No. 8, concerning a visit made on November 7, 1944 by Albert A. Kadler, representative of the Swiss Legation at Berlin, "Stalag Luft III" Folder, "Camp Reports-Germany-Stalag Luft" File [American POW Information Bureau, Office of the Provost Marshall General], Record Group 389 [Modern Military Branch, National Archives].

⁶Report of a visit made on May 27, 1943 by an unnamed Y.M.C.A. representative, "Stalag Luft III" Folder, "Camp Reports-Germany-Stalag Luft" File, Record Group 389.

⁷Report by Alexander G. Robinson, Senior Chaplain, East Compound, February 12, 1943, "History" Folder, "Stalag Luft III" File, "Prisoners of War" Drawer, Research Division, Air Force Museum, Wright Patterson AFB, Ohio.

⁸Report prepared by the Y.M.C.A. at Geneva regarding the religious activities, the library, and the athletic recreation at the

MacDonald, a Protestant minister who served the Americans in South Compound, won a devoted following. He is said to have been a man of obvious sincerity who spoke with a rich Scottish accent. One report notes that on Sunday mornings after Appell, "it was quite a sight to see a thousand men running pell-mell for six hundred seats at Padre Mac's service."⁹ Even allowing for some exaggeration in this account, it is quite clear that the minister's popularity noticeably boosted the attendance figures in South Compound.

In addition to the usual Sunday morning services, a wide range of religious activities were offered in the camp. There were church choirs in each of the compounds, Bible and confirmation classes, religious instructions, lectures on church history and various religious topics, and opportunities for personal counseling. Special services were prepared for Christmas and Easter, including nativity readings and repeated renderings of Handel's Messiah. Evening and midweek services were held regularly, and the Stations of the Cross were said during Lent. But statistics and a listing of activities do not reveal as much about the role of religion in Stalag Luft III as do the words of Colonel Spivey:

The place where I found time and the desire to pray was while I was locked in solitary confinement [at Dulag Luft] and had time to reflect on what my family must be suffering, knowing of my

Central Compound of Stalag Luft III, based on information received from the camp at the end of September 1944, transmitted from American Legation, Bern to Special War Problems Division, Department of State, Washington, File No. 711.62004 A.I.R./11-1644 ["Reports of Inspection of Camps for American Prisoners in Germany"], Record Group 59 [Diplomatic Branch, National Archives].

⁹R. W. Kimball and O. M. Chiesl, Clipped Wings (n.p., by the author, n.d.), n.p.

MIA status but not knowing whether I was safe or not. I prayed for them and throughout the entire time I was a prisoner a day never went by but that I had a little session with God on many problems and I received a great deal of solace that way. I know that many others fell back on their religion and developed their religious lives more than ever before.¹⁰

In their views on morals, the prisoners in Stalag Luft III represented a cross section of humanity. Sex, of course, was a frequent topic of conversation. Colonel Spivey had an excellent opportunity to notice how the men handled themselves in this regard. Shortly after the war, he wrote:

Many of the men spent many of their waking hours bemoaning the fact that they had no female companionship and that they had not completely explored and exploited all their possibilities before being shot down. Contrary to the British custom that women were never mentioned in the club, all of the kriegies whiled away long hours telling lies of their conquests and what they were going to do when they got home. The censors picked up one letter which a boy had written to his wife in which he advised her to paint their bedroom ceiling her favorite color before he returned home since she would spend many hours looking at it when he got back

The British officers seemed to have more wife and sweetheart trouble than the Americans since they had been separated from their wives longer. Besides, the dashing men of the American army of occupation in England had so much money and were such gay blades bent on adventure that some of the poor British women just couldn't remain faithful any longer. It all led to the decision on the part of one British wife who wrote her longtime POW husband that the Americans were overpaid, overfed, oversexed, and over here. Since the first two didn't apply to us Kriegies, the latter [two] worried us a great deal

I had anticipated that I would run into

¹⁰Spivey, "History," 76.

trouble with the men and that homosexual tendencies would appear from time to time. So many articles and stories have been printed concerning such activities among prisoners and even the general public here in the USA that one of the first things I did was to have my squadron [Block] commanders keep a special lookout for any queer activities. The long hours of close confinement with overcrowded conditions prevailing nearly all the time offered possibilities for such activities, but they never occurred, or, if they did, they were never brought to the attention of any of my commanders or to me. It is to the everlasting credit of the American officers that they were men and acted in a rational manner concerning sex at all times while POWs.¹¹

Sometimes the men were given unexpectedly vivid reminders of their plight. Spivey mentions two instances in particular. In the first case, a young man received pictures from his best girl displaying practically all her charms along with assurances that she was saving them all for him. In the second instance, about 200 prisoners lined up along the guardrail with eager eyes and drooling mouths to gaze at a sunbather some forty feet away just across the fence who was enjoying the admiration and longing of the men behind the wire. Spivey noted that the Kommandant tried to keep women from appearing near the camp, but that some of the young German mail censors would walk by from time to time, Spivey surmised, "for the purpose of being mentally raped by a thousand men." No women ever came into the camp, however, and the warnings the men received in England about the German use of lewd women to break down the soldier's

¹¹Ibid.

will to fight were unnecessary as far as the prisoners were concerned. Spivey expressed relief at the absence of women: "I can imagine the discord, suffering, and mischief a few women could have caused in our camp and I shall always be grateful they were not there."¹²

Liquor, or "brew," did not pose a serious problem in Stalag Luft III, primarily because it was scarce. Almost everyone in camp, and especially the senior officers and German camp staff, realized the special dangers even a little innocent drinking could pose. An intoxicated prisoner could too easily get himself killed and bring down a spray of bullets on other prisoners as well. In spite of the various efforts to discourage the consumption of alcohol, some prisoners always managed to procure it from somewhere, oftentimes from their own homemade stills.

Experiments among the prisoners in making brew dated back to Barth. Wings Day discovered the men there attempting to make brew by the most primitive method known to man—chewing up potato peelings and spitting them into mess cans in an effort to get the starch to turn into sugar. He immediately forbade all brewing from potato skins. A more successful approach was to use the dried fruit in Red Cross parcels and yeast obtained from one of the Germans. After fermentation, this brew was distilled with the aid of a large milk tin with half a football bladder wired to the top and the neck of the bladder attached to the mouthpiece opening of a trombone, the latter then being placed under running cold water. According to Wing's

¹²Ibid., 91-95.

biographer, "the first bottle of pure alcohol from this remarkable contraption was ceremoniously presented to Wings, who declared it horrible but nevertheless a major breakthrough in prisoner-of-war Kultur."¹³

The British prisoners in particular made the brewing and drinking of liquor a part of camp life. Spivey reached Sagan in the summer of 1943 and recalls:

Our British friends saved their brew and put on a grand farewell party for the Americans before we left for our own compounds. Two large rooms were fitted up as bars and several of the boys who took feminine roles in the local POW productions dressed up as barmaids and painted their cheeks like hussies Colonel Goodrich and the other older POW colonels were especially honored guests and I, as a new-comer, went along with them. There was much conviviality and some close harmony, a few bawdy songs by Wings Day and several others, and a couple of farewell speeches by hosts and guests. I had a couple of tin can cups of brew and felt a little uneasy in my stomach so I went out of the barracks and sat on the sunny side right under a window where I could hear the singing. That was a mistake, because I had no more than got comfortably seated when one of the boys on the inside became violently ill and regurgitated the brew and cookies all over my rather bald head. I was a mess and the senior British officers were very apologetic.

My reaction to the party was one of revulsion for the most part. Some of the older POWs became very maudlin and wept and then disappeared to sleep off the effects of drunkenness in their bunks. Others wanted to fight and there was much horseplay around the barmaids which didn't sit too well at the time. My overall impression of the drunks was that they were frustrated from one cause or another

¹³Sydney Smith, Mission Escape (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1968), 76-77.

and the alcohol acted to release the pent-up feelings which they had been so carefully concealing. I was determined I would not allow brews in my camp.¹⁴

The making of brew in fact was limited in both Center and South Compounds.

One other aspect of prisoner morality, or lack of it, which disturbed Colonel Spivey was the prisoners' uncontrolled use of profane and obscene talk. Recalling some of the measures the compound staff adopted in an effort to clean up the men's language, he stated:

We had several conferences on the subject after the British and Canadians left [in January 1944]. The Canadians, like Americans, were super foul-mouthed and it was decided it would be easier to begin our drive with them gone. We strove with might and main to remember George Washington's classical order pertaining to swearing and I believe we came up with a fairly good replica of it. We published it along with several editorials on the subject, had meetings and devised penalties which each combine enforced to a degree consistent with their wishes. Our efforts helped, but the habit remained.¹⁵

Special Celebrations

The prisoners endeavored to recreate as closely as possible the past way of life they knew and loved. One of the ways they kept their memories alive was to celebrate all the annual festivals and days of special significance such as their birthdays, the Fourth of July, Memorial Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter. A description of the activities some of them engaged in on Christmas day will serve to demonstrate the fervor and emotion such events

¹⁴Spivey, "History," 96.

¹⁵Ibid., 99.

engendered in the prisoners. Colonel Spivey provides a narrative of the Christmas of 1943:

Feeling sorry for us in center [because we did not have any brew] the group captains in east sent over to the colonels in my room enough to make up quite a shaker full of "orange blossoms"

The Germans must have felt sorry for us because our chief censor, von Massau, sent me a bottle of the finest French brandy, and the lager officer, Hauptmann Shultz, brought me another bottle of brandy. I think the British padre got the wrong impression of me because he brought over from his room a bottle of sacramental wine which he said he never [would] need since the war would be over long before he could use it in the church. We drank the drinks at an official reception in my room for the camp staff and the squadron commanders and then I made a speech before several hundred in which I promised them all that none of us would be there for Christmas 1944, as all of us would be home. My, how wrong I was! We sang songs and tried to be gay but in our hearts not one of us was happy and each of us wondered what the future would bring and what our families were doing at that very moment. I felt particularly sentimental on this first Christmas because that day I had received my first word from home since July 1943 and I had to bite my lip until it bled to keep from crying when I saw my wife's handwriting and the childish note from my young son.

The commandant had granted us permission to visit each of the camps to wish one another a Merry Christmas. About ten of us senior officers were allowed to go after duly signing our parole. My group met east camp group and we chatted on our way over to north where we joined a group celebrating the Yuletide in a truly festive manner. They had the barracks decorated and bars set up to get rid of the verboten grog. We all had several drinks and then moved on to south where we were to have dinner with Colonel Goodrich. More grog and then a kriegle banquet. There was some good singing and quite a little buffoonery and when the German guards were ready to take us back they couldn't find part of us and no one seemed to care whether we left or not

That night was hectic because several of the British from east climbed right over the barbed wire fence between our camps for the purpose of paying us a visit. I was afraid they would be shot but the senior abwehr sergeant saw the humor

in the horseplay and had instructed his guards not to shoot when they climbed the fence between camps. He pleaded with me to round up the boys from east so he could march them back. We hurried up the process and he took them over. It wasn't ten minutes before one of them appeared in my room to say he had forgotten to wish me a Merry Christmas and before I could stop him he was dashing for the barbed wire and back over he went with the German guard waving his rifle in full glare of a powerful searchlight. He didn't shoot.

There were many repercussions from the Christmas parties. Some of the men were sick, others morose and all had that terrible indescribable feeling of loneliness and uncertainty which held us after any little excitement. The commandant had other feelings and he gave . . . a stern warning as to what would happen if anything like that ever happened again. His wrath didn't descend on center compound because nearly all had remained sober through necessity. He even praised us a bit and said we could be excused from roll call on New Year's Day! The boys got quite a kick out of that and proceeded to call all Germans an extra special kind of S.O.B.¹⁶

Two other prisoners recalled the special meaning the Christmas of 1944 held for them. The first man, from West Compound, wrote after the war:

Christmas day, 1944, proved to be much happier than any homesick Kriegie had reason to hope for because of a beautiful gesture by the Mail Officer and a few others in his confidence. At evening roll call on December 24, the men were waiting in orderly formation for dismissal after the count had been taken when sleigh bells and general clatter announced the arrival of a small wagon carrying Santa Claus, resplendent in a red and white suit, and an assistant. The wagon was pulled by two men dressed as reindeer. As the assembled men watched hopefully, Santa made the rounds tossing out bundles of mail to each group as he passed. Faces were a little brighter as the men returned to the barracks. Santa had

¹⁶Ibid., 97-99.

brought the Spirit of Christmas to this lonely camp in the wilderness where the ever-burning light of hope at times grew dim. Mail had been allowed to accumulate over a period to permit Santa's visit.¹⁷

The second account, written only very recently, describes a memorable moment in Center Compound.

Normally, the Germans locked us up as soon as it became dark. On [Christmas Eve, 1944] they made a special concession and let us visit in the various blocks until well after dark. Then, after we had all been confined, I remember a brass ensemble—a couple of trumpets, an alto horn, a trombone or two, and a baritone . . . played "Silent Night." In the still bitter cold of that lonely, dark night, the music, played by American prisoners in the middle of the compound, had a great impact on all of us. It became deathly quiet in the cell blocks as everyone paused to hear the clear, mellow strains of this beautiful, traditional Christmas carol. And there were some misty eyes here and there. I can remember that some of our German guards were as touched as we were. I suspect that this auditory impression will remain with me always; in fact, I never hear "Silent Night" without recalling that night in Sagan.¹⁸

Education

The educational programs in Stalag Luft III were plagued by difficulties, and yet they represent one of the prisoners' most successful endeavors. "Sagan U," or "Kriegie College," as the prisoners affectionately called their educational system, offered poor facilities, suffered from a lack of textbooks and teaching materials, and experienced slumps in student performance at times when the war news was

¹⁷Bob Neary, Stalag Luft III: Sagan...Nuernberg...Moosburg. A Collection of German Prison Camp Sketches with Descriptive Text Based on Personal Experiences (North Wales, Pa.: by the author, 1946), 19. Hereinafter cited as Stalag Luft III: Sagan.

¹⁸Loren E. Jackson to author, February 2, 1975.

exceptionally good or bad. But it did succeed in offering a wide range of courses, enjoyed large enrollments, and achieved recognition by examining boards in England and Canada and many universities in the United States, thereby allowing the prisoners to earn full credit for courses completed while in the prison camp.

The educational facilities in Stalag Luft III were inadequate in terms of both equipment and classroom space. The classes were held in small rooms set aside for such purposes, but the rooms were frequently in undesirable locations. In Center Compound, for example, classes were held in three small rooms, two of them in one end of the theater building and a third next to the potato room in the east kitchen. The rooms were crowded and were cold in the winter. Students using the one in the kitchen had to contend with the smell of rotting food while those using the rooms in the theater found themselves in competition with noise from the band, orchestra, and choral groups which practiced there. For equipment the prisoners turned to the Y.M.C.A. from whom they obtained large blackboards, books, and other educational materials. The Germans provided tables and benches but frequently took them away for use in the barracks. Thus in early 1944 East Compound reported that there were neither tables nor benches available for use by the prisoners in the classrooms. North Compound made a similar complaint.¹⁹

¹⁹Unless otherwise specified, the information presented in this section is taken from the following: Education Reports found in the "History" Folder, "Stalag Luft III" File, "Prisoner of War" Drawer, Research Division, Air Force Museum, Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio; Education Reports, "Education and Entertainment" Folder, "Stalag Luft III" File, "Prisoners of War" Drawer, Research Division, Air Force Museum, Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio; Report of visit made on February 22, 1943 by Mr. J. E. Friedrich and Dr. Bubb, representatives of the

An even bigger problem than obtaining adequate facilities was to maintain student interest in academic work. The enrollments were usually large enough at the beginning of each semester—often amounting to fifty per cent of the prisoner population—but interest lagged as time went on until only about forty to sixty per cent of those who originally signed up for courses still attended class. Reasons for the declining interest were many. There were, of course, the usual causes such as lack of aptitude or inadequate educational background. More important, however, were factors like the weather and the war situation. During the winter months when the prisoners had to remain inside most of the time, the courses were avidly pursued. When spring and summer weather arrived, the students tended to become restless and turned their attention to outdoor activities. The men were always highly sensitive to the current war situation, and being young and unsure of their future vocations, it did not take much distraction to provide an excuse for missing classes and forgetting to prepare lessons. The educational staff tried with little success to maintain attendance rates and uphold student interest by checking roll, administering exams, and awarding proper recognition to those who finished the required work.

In addition to consuming time and occupying the students' attention, many of the courses offered the students opportunities to acquire college credit. Credit was given only for those courses for which adequate facilities and qualified instructors were available,

International Red Cross, File No. 740.00114EW/3977, Record Group 59; Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part I, Section 2d; Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3A(5).

and only after the students had performed in a way that was comparable to what one might expect to find on an average college campus. Thus, while no credit was given for science courses which required lab facilities, full credit could be earned for courses in business, social science, and the humanities. The English prisoners obtained the credits only after they had passed exams at various levels of difficulty administered by agencies in England, a few of which were:

Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music
Institute of Civil Engineers
Institute of Bankers
Institute of Chartered Accountants
Cambridge of London Certificates of Proficiency
in German, Russian and French

The Americans received certificates signed by the compound commanders, and in Center Compound 350 prisoners received certificates of completion. Although statistics are not available, one source indicates that after the war colleges in the United States granted credit to many of the former prisoners on the basis of the certificates earned in Stalag Luft III.²⁰

A surprisingly long list of courses was offered in the various compounds. Understandably, the British prisoners developed the most extensive programs since they were in camp longer. During the spring semester of 1944 East Compound offered seventy different classes in forty-five subjects. This was about the same time that West Compound was just opening, and hence the prisoners in that compound were able to enjoy courses for only a short time before the camp was evacuated.

²⁰David R. Porter, Books and Education Section, War Prisoners' Aid of the Young Men's Christian Assns. to Delmar T. Spivey, February 19, 1946; "POW Letters-General" Folder, Spivey Collection.

Here again, however, one gains an insight into the prisoners' ability to transfer their communities almost intact, for though Belaria Compound opened only in January 1944, by May 1944 the education program there offered thirty-five courses in twenty-seven subjects. No statistics are available on West and South Compound, but Center Compound consistently offered between twenty-five and thirty-five classes and maintained an average enrollment of about 500 students. The courses offered most frequently included:

Advanced Algebra	Agriculture
Trigonometry	Zoology
Integral Calculus	Meteorology
Differential Calculus	Accounting
Algebra and Arithmetic	Sociology
Speech	Music
Grammar	Shorthand
English Literature	Photography
Debating	French
Geology	Spanish
Chemistry	German
Body Building	

In addition to the formal classes, there were special programs and lectures designed to meet specific needs and interests. In South Compound law students were able to complete upwards of one year of law study. Future Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach was among those who studied law while in Stalag Luft III. At least thirteen students studied for the ministry. Courses in military subjects were taught for those who wanted to apply for permanent commissions after the war. When the senior officers teaching the military course in Center Compound needed some organizational charts depicting the command structure of the American military forces, a German Lager Officer graciously supplied them along with the names of key personnel

in the American command structure.²¹ One biology student even offered to teach a course in the human sexual matters in an effort to raise the sex discussions in camp to an academic level. Special courses were also offered in mountaineering, gardening, handicrafts, journalism, and broadcasting, to mention only a few.

There were also discussion and debating groups, the latter sometimes leading to inter-compound debating tournaments. Some of the topics discussed in Center Compound were:

- Business and Business Opportunities
- The World at Peace
- War Aims
- The Negro Problem
- The Treaties of Paris and their Consequences
(Versailles)
- Labor in the United States
- Religion
- Modern Education
- Opportunities in the Western Hemisphere
- The Farm and its Problems

Libraries

Each compound had at least two libraries, one for reference materials and another which served as a general lending library for both fiction and nonfiction works. The libraries were a necessary component of the educational program, but their overall importance was even greater, the fiction library especially being "probably the greatest morale factor in the camp next to the Red Army."²²

The titles and quantities of books found in the libraries varied from time to time, but the holdings were impressive by prison camp

²¹Interview with John Wells, January 26-27, 1975.

²²Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part I, Section 2d.

standards. Within the first year after the camp opened, the prisoners in East and Center Compounds alone had access to 8,500 volumes, about two-thirds of them being literary works and one-third scientific works. Not included in these figures are some 20,000 private volumes which the prisoners had received in private parcels and circulated among themselves. A breakdown by category indicates that the Center Compound lending library at one time held:

<u>Category</u>	<u>Copies</u>
General Fiction	1,128
Western Fiction	75
Detective Fiction	342
Biography	28
Miscellaneous	171
Paperback Fiction	<u>200</u>
Total	1,944

The reference libraries contained fewer books, averaging about five hundred volumes in each compound.²³ In addition, many of the books

²³As of March 4, 1943 German regulations prohibited the following books and materials in camp:

- a. Navigational charts, plans, wharf and code maps or parts thereof
- b. Meteorological charts
- c. Charts of currents
- d. Navigational reference books, including sailing instructions
- e. Lists of lights
- f. Lists of wireless signals
- g. Tide tables
- h. Distance tables
- i. Nautical and air almanacs, directories and calendars
- j. Information of any nature relative to ports, harbors, anchorages and inland waterways
- k. Military, naval or air force subjects
- l. Chemistry
- m. Espionage
- n. Explosives
- o. Geography and map making
- p. Lithography
- q. Politics
- r. Weapons and armaments

in the reference libraries in the American compounds were British and therefore of somewhat lesser value in the eyes of the Americans since notable differences existed in the British and American approaches to topics ranging from financial accounting and agriculture to law practice and literature. The reference libraries, however, were used extensively not only because students had to share many textbooks for their course work, but also because the rooms used for the reference libraries were usually larger than those which housed the lending libraries and therefore provided one of the few places where the

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- s. Wireless and radio
 - t. Enemy propaganda
 - u. Any subject which may be considered doubtful or of a technical or scientific nature, including patents, inventions, and discoveries

"Summary of Regulations pertaining to Book Programs for Prisoners of War," March 3, 1943 File No. 740.00114EW/3227, Record Group 59. On October 14, 1943, the Germans proposed to liberalize the regulations to allow the prisoners to receive books on technology, physics, chemistry, optics, wireless telegraphy, aeronautics, navigation, shipbuilding, astronomy, meteorology, geography and the like. They reasoned that "instructions contained in textbooks relating to the manufacture of articles which could serve as a means of escape or sabotage, as well as details regarding the manufacture of radio apparatus, etc., do not constitute a reason to withhold these books, the prisoners of war lacking the possibilities of putting the acquired knowledge to practical use because the necessary material is not available to them." (Emphasis added). Memorandum on German Proposal regarding Reading Materials for Prisoners of War, from the Legation of Switzerland, Washington, D.C., to the Department of German Interests, October 14, 1943, File No. 711.62114A/71 ["United States Prisoners of War Detained by Germany"], Record Group 59 [Diplomatic Branch, National Archives]. It is unlikely that any knowledgeable Germans really believed the materials required to make radios, etc., were unavailable to the prisoners and so it is possible the above proposal was primarily a propaganda measure. Another possible explanation is that they believed the materials were less available to Allied prisoners in Germany than they were to Axis prisoners in Allied hands, and that the liberalized regulations would therefore benefit the latter far more than the former. In any event the proposal does not seem to have received serious consideration in this country.

prisoners could find a quiet place to study and keep warm in the winter. The reference library in Center Compound could seat sixty and was generally full from ten o'clock in the morning until ten at night. Unfortunately, the libraries, like the rest of the camp, lacked sufficient lighting. The reference library in Center, for example, contained only two 60-watt bulbs for a room large enough to contain tables and benches for sixty men.

The condition of the books deteriorated rapidly because of frequent use and the absence of materials for their repair. It was noted in Center Compound that the more popular novels began to show signs of wear after about thirty or forty readings, and from that point on deteriorated rapidly. This was a serious problem since records kept by the libraries in Center Compound indicated that the holdings of the library changed hands about every ten days.²⁴

American magazines were also placed in the reference library and eagerly read and re-read. The issues most frequently received in the American compounds included National Geographic, McCalls, Yale Review, Harper's, The Atlantic Monthly, and The New Yorker. German pictorial magazines were also sent into the camp.

The prisoners received their books and magazines from several sources. Large quantities of books arrived in personal parcels and these were willingly passed around or donated to the libraries after the recipient had read them. The magazines were usually paid for out

²⁴Delmar T. Spivey, "Report of Center Compound Activities," February 3, 1944, "Education and Entertainment" Folder, "Stalag Luft III" File, "Prisoners of War" Drawer, Research Division, Air Force Museum, Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio. Hereinafter cited as "Report."

of the communal funds. In addition, organizations such as the International Red Cross, the Canadian Legion Educational Services, the European Student Relief Fund, the International Bureau of Education, and the Y.M.C.A. were all instrumental in procuring and transmitting book donations from a variety of sources.

Newsrooms

Closely associated with both the educational programs and the libraries were the compound newsrooms, for they too offered the prisoners much needed diversion and a means of enhancing their knowledge and perspective of what was going on around them both in the camp and in the world beyond the barbed wire. Almost every man in Stalag Luft III, including most of the Germans who worked inside the compounds, stopped at least once a day to check the latest news as depicted on large wall maps and carefully printed or typed briefs. The newsrooms were usually located in or near the cookhouses or theaters, primarily because those were the places the Germans installed their loudspeaker system through which news communiques transmitted from Radio Breslau were broadcast to the prisoners throughout the day.

The news items were gathered from a variety of sources and were posted in several different formats. Volunteers translated the news in the communiques and either wrote it out in longhand or typed it on the Adjutant's typewriter. In addition, the German newspapers that were sent into the camp provided numerous items that were

translated and posted in the same manner.²⁵

The translating and the posting were accomplished by volunteers who usually possessed a specialized knowledge either of the language or of the topic being discussed. Each compound boasted a staff of twelve to fifteen individuals who together posted about five to eight thousand words daily in South Compound and approximately fifty type-written pages along with photographs each week in Center Compound. In Center the postings were organized into the following categories:

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. East Front | 6. Neutral Countries |
| 2. West Front | 7. Inside Germany |
| 3. Italy | 8. Balkans |
| 4. United States | 9. British Commonwealth |
| 5. Occupied Countries | 10. The rest of the world |

The topic that usually drew the most attention was the war news, and considerable effort was expended to keep the prisoners fully informed on the latest developments. Large maps were obtained from the

²⁵The list of daily papers and magazines delivered to Center Compound included:

<u>Das Reich</u>	<u>Leipzig Illustrierte</u>	<u>Signal</u>
<u>Simplicissimus</u> (Munich)	<u>Koeln Illustrierte</u>	<u>VB</u>
<u>Wiener Illustrierte</u>	<u>Illustrata Camerata</u>	<u>Berlinger Borsen Zeitung</u>
<u>Die Wehrmacht</u>	<u>Deutsche Kraftfahrt</u>	<u>Krakauer Zeitung</u>
<u>Die Woche</u>	<u>Der Adler</u>	<u>Hamburger Fremdenblatt</u>
<u>Munchener Illustrierte</u>	<u>Der Adler</u> (English)	<u>Pommersche Zeitung</u>
<u>Stuttgart Illustrierte</u>	<u>Der Adler</u> (French)	<u>Faustian Lustige</u>
<u>Hamburg Illustrierte</u>	<u>The Camp</u> (as issued)	<u>Enlace</u>

The Illustrierte were German pictorial magazines. The magazine Simplicissimus was a "Savage Jew-baiting propaganda organ replete with sadistic cartoons." The English-language propaganda material consisted of three periodicals, two newspapers and one pictorial. One newspaper, the O.K. (Overseas Kid) was printed exclusively for American prisoners. Its counterpart for the British was The Camp. The pictorial Signal, printed in many different languages, was "a rather crude attempt to copy Life magazine," but the photographs were good. Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part I, Section 2e. For more information on the newsroom in South Compound, see Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3B(17).

canteens and mounted on the walls. When appropriate maps in sufficient quantities could not be obtained from this source, maps that had been carefully drawn by hand were used. As the military campaigning increased in 1944, the men diligently scrutinized the situation maps, and it became quite a task to keep the battle line strings on the right towns and the flags in the proper islands on the Pacific. At the end of each month the area specialists in South Compound also wrote a summary of events in their respective theater of operations. Having carefully studied the communiques and articles dealing with their spheres of interest, they were in a better position than anyone else to present an unbiased survey of the developments in their sector. Their summaries gave not only a coherent picture of the developments over a month's time, but also, by a discerning separation of fact from propaganda, gave a somewhat truer picture of the news as it actually happened than a cursory reading of the papers could give. Special charts were also posted in South Compound depicting all the USAAF and RAF raids with the announced aircraft losses as well as a log of Allied aircraft sightings over Germany as reported on the radio broadcasts.

Compound Publications

Compound newspapers were also posted in the newsrooms, primarily because the shortage of paper permitted the issuance of only one copy which had to be shared by everyone. The papers exhibited print on only one side of the page and were spread out on the wall so that a number of individuals could read them at one time. The publishing endeavors that were undertaken inside the wires of Stalag

Luft III reflected much of the free enterprise spirit and penchant for freedom of the press usually associated with Americans. Within weeks after each compound opened, energetic individuals organized staffs of reporters, artists, and layout men who devoted their efforts to producing newspapers that resembled as closely as possible the newspapers circulated in the United States.²⁶ Even the spirit of competitiveness was present as evidenced by the appearance at times of more than one newspaper in each compound, each one attempting to provide interesting coverage of the scarce news in an effort to win the largest readership. The newsmen were convinced that a need existed for their services²⁷ and diligently strove to meet the expectations of the prisoners. They sought to expose the men to ideas and news items that would give them a better perspective of the problems that faced them as prisoners, and perhaps even help them forget for a moment or two that they were prisoners. The newspapers provided numerous outlets for the prisoners' need for recognition, self-expression, and emotional release. Individual feats were publicized and group efforts were noted and applauded. Generally speaking, the entire community's sense of identity was enhanced through the pages

²⁶Only the newspapers published in the American compounds will be discussed here since little information is available in the United States on the papers published in the British compounds.

²⁷Arthur Dreyer, editor of the Kriegle Klarion, a West Compound newspaper, states that he received more job satisfaction and exhibited more professionalism in the performance of his duties during the time he served as the paper's editor than at any other time in his military career. He was convinced that his job was important and had his convictions confirmed by the large group of men who gathered around the bulletin board to read the news each time an edition came out. He feels to this day that the value of an adequate communications program in a prisoner of war camp is inestimable. Interview with Arthur Dreyer, February 25, 1976.

of the compound publications. Official pronouncements, sports reports, entertainment notices, critical reviews and essays, poetry, song lyrics, advertisements, and news items from around the camp and from the United States were all put into print. Even investigative reporting found its place as a vehicle for getting out into the open topics which needed a general airing before the rumor factory distorted the facts of the case beyond recognition.

Virtually all of the publishing efforts were successful in terms of capturing the prisoners' interests and meeting their needs. Only four of the seven ventures, however, managed to sustain an unbroken record of publication from the time they were launched until the camp was evacuated in January 1945. The other three endeavors, though well received prior to their demise, succumbed to the rigors of publishing behind barbed wire and, for reasons which will be explained shortly, ceased to exist after varying lengths of time.

From October 27, 1943 until the day of evacuation, Center Compound was kept well informed through the pages of one and, for a time, two newspapers. The Gefangenen Gazette sustained an unbroken record of publication throughout that time, while its competitor, the Kriegle Times, published thirty editions between January 1, 1944 and August 27, 1944, ceasing publication then because of the demands of other camp duties upon its editor and the other members of the newspaper's staff.²⁸ An article written in the Gazette when the Kriegle

²⁸The information available today regarding the compound newspapers comes primarily from individuals who either worked on the newspapers or read them rather than from the newspapers themselves, most of which were left behind and presumably destroyed when the camp was evacuated in January 1945. Certain editions of the newspapers were

Times ceased publication included the following comment about the two papers:

Begun as a source of entertainment and background for future enterprises, the scene has changed considerably, applicable to both newspapers. Even though the Gazette was started several months prior to the founding of the Times, the need for newspapers was [imperative]. News was scarce. The papers gathered bits from all outlying sources and wove them into clarified and readable matter.

Rumor and conjecture were in full bloom in the fall of 1943. No news was ever given from an authoritative source. With the beginning of the camp newspapers, rumors were gathered, sifted and clarified and the papers acted as the only source of authoritative news, a much needed ramification of the administration. Until a few months ago, no official bulletin boards were present and then but little official information was released. Carrying the burden from the start, the papers shaped the kriegie reading public, and to this day, are still looked to for official releases.²⁹

The Compound Commanders decided the official information that would be released. The newspaper reporters, however, were not remiss in their duties of "keeping the administration honest." Whenever access was granted, a reporter attended the staff meetings and pressed camp leaders for information about negotiations with the Germans, the state of camp supply, and any controversial issues that might have arisen. Colonel Spivey sometimes became irritated at the

sent to the families of the various editors during the war through the Red Cross, but only a few of them arrived intact. The one exception to this rule is the Gefangenen Gazette. A complete set of the editions of this paper was sent to the home of its editor, Ronald Delaney, and he has generously granted the present author free use of the entire set. The collection is scheduled for deposit in the Special Collections Room of the USAF Academy Library, Colorado, and is footnoted as such throughout the remainder of this study.

²⁹Gefangenen Gazette, August 30, 1944.

reporter's persistence and was perhaps more than a little chagrined that even in a prison camp a commander could not get away from the nosey members of the press.³⁰ At the same time he was wise enough to appreciate thoroughly the fine public service being performed by the newspapers and gave them unstinting official support as well as considerable personal attention and praise. One suspects that his experience and reaction was typical of that found among the other Compound Commanders.

In South Compound, two newspapers and a magazine flourished within two months after the compound opened. The first to be published, the Circuit, appeared regularly from October 1943 until the end of the war. Its competitor, the Shaft, was well received but had a short life. A satirical news sheet that poked fun at the Circuit and kriegle life in general, the Shaft was reportedly full of good humor, witty articles, and scathing diatribes. One headline read: "A Prisoner's Day." Fifteen lines of white blankness followed. Much to the disappointment of the prisoners in South Compound, the Shaft ceased publication after its fifth issue. Perhaps the most ambitious publishing venture in Stalag Luft III was The New Yorker. Also published in South Compound, the editors of the magazine attempted to imitate in every detail, the original New Yorker. The writing was reportedly superb, exhibiting a matter-of-fact style in columns like "Profiles," "Talk of the Town," and "Goings on About Town" that had the frank and saucy touch of the real copy. Expert cover paintings, cartoons, and hand-lettered headlines added authenticity to the eight-page editions that appeared on the newsroom wall. After two excellent productions,

³⁰Interview with Delmar T. Spivey, April 19, 1975.

one at Thanksgiving and the other at Christmas, The New Yorker also ceased to exist. Again, the prisoners regretted the loss, but readily understood that the venture simply required too much work.³¹

The two competitors in West Compound were entitled the Stalag Stump and the Kriegle Klarion. Issued each Sunday, these two papers "looked like little more than glorified notice sheets compared to civilian standards, but to the prisoners they looked like the Sunday Times."³² Local news of front page significance concerned such things as a new musical show to be put on by the kriegies, the arrival of sports or musical equipment, an interview with General Vanaman during one of his visits into West Compound, or the opening of a new school semester. The Klarion featured a "news and views" page which contained poetry, drawings of airplanes and girls, comic verse, and the results of a weekly poll on various topics. One of the prisoners in West Compound, Sam Northcross, formerly had been associated with Professor George Gallup and his Institute of American Opinion.³³ Northcross supervised the block correspondents who sought to obtain the prisoners' opinions which were considered valuable although often marked by cynicism. A poll taken in November 1944 showed that the men thought the war would be over by April 1, 1945.

³¹Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3B(15).

³²Arthur Dreyer, "The 'Kriegle' Press," Air Force (March-April 1946), 47. The information presented here on the newspapers in West Compound is extracted from Dreyer's article and from an interview with Dreyer conducted on February 25, 1976.

³³Center Compound also had a polling organization called the "Pulse," which was copied after models used in the British compounds. Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part I, Section 2f.

Another poll showed that an overwhelming majority of the prisoners wanted to join a new veterans organization with no ties to World War I groups. An example of how these polls could sometimes be useful can be seen in one that was taken in January 1945 regarding the distribution of the dwindling Red Cross food parcels. The Commander of West Compound, Colonel Darr Alkire, wanted to find out if the men would rather go from the half rations they were then on to quarter rations or continue to consume the parcels at the current rate. The further reduction to quarter parcels would have assured the men of something to eat for a longer time but would have lowered morale and weakened the men's health to a point they apparently were unwilling to accept. The Klarion pollsters covered the entire compound and had the results to Colonel Alkire in slightly over two hours. The men decided, by a wide margin, to stay on half parcels and Colonel Alkire respected their wishes.

During the summer sports season, the Klarion came out every morning with a small daily, listing games to be played that day, scores and summaries of games played the day before and new standings in the compound's two softball leagues. In addition, mid-week news was published in a Klarion supplement which appeared every Thursday. During the winter when there was little to report on the sports page of the supplement, features were written by the sports experts amongst the prisoners. They included Hal Van Every, former Minnesota football great; Bud Elrod, All-American end from Mississippi State; Fay Frink, center and captain of Penn's gridiron team; and Lou Zaris, a New Jersey amateur boxing champ.

The newspapers even ran advertisements. They not only added to

the American image of the newspaper, but also served a purpose. One ad encouraged kriegies to use the tooth powder given to them by saying: "Use Dr. Vierling's Zahnpulver—why take a paste in the mouth if you can take a powder."³⁴ Another example, this one exemplifying the competitive spirit that existed between the two compound newspapers, read as follows:

Kriegie Klarion hits the spot
Six full pages, that's a lot
Twice as much as the Stump gives you
Kriegie Klarion's the paper for you³⁵

The competition between the various compound newspapers was keen and healthy. The papers were not in a circulation race as all of them were one-copy editions which had about as many readers as there were prisoners in the compounds. Rather, the competition was born out of and fostered by that spirit of freedom to exhibit one's individuality in pursuit of excellence, regardless of the circumstances. The competition encouraged the editors to be bold in placing heavy demands upon their volunteer workers and it encouraged the workers to meet deadlines which otherwise might have slipped by all too easily under the guise of adversity and the scarcity of news.³⁶ Even the pressure of obtaining the "scoop" was nourished by the presence of two newspapers,

³⁴Dreyer, "The 'Kriegie' Press," 47.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Dreyer stated that as a result of his training at the University of Missouri School of Journalism, from which he graduated just before joining the service, he insisted that the Klarion be posted on the wall each week in time for the men to read after church. In order to meet this self-imposed deadline, he often passed through the barracks and urged his reporters "with a cane" to get out and finish their work, a task they were often reluctant to do, especially in the winter when they preferred to remain inside where it was warm.

as shown by the compound commanders' need to censor the papers before they were published. The search for news often brought out into the open topics which needed widespread discussion, but at times the investigative reporting ruffled feathers and caused unnecessary alarm, the repeated references to seemingly non-existent "rackets" being the classic example of the latter.

The news printed in the papers came from several sources. In keeping with the block form of organization throughout the camp, there was usually a reporter from each of the two papers assigned to each of the blocks. With two men competitively covering each block, virtually everything that was newsworthy was reported, and when space permitted, duly printed. The most highly sought after news came from the new prisoners. Whenever a new purge arrived in a compound, the recent arrivals were asked a barrage of questions. The Klarion sometimes ran a full page covering the stories obtained in this way, and accordingly was able to inform the old prisoners about such new developments as the adoption of the GI Bill of Rights, the creation of the combat infantry badge, and a report that Dinah Shore was "wowing" the boys in France.

One of the most popular features in all of the newspapers was a variation of something called "Out of the Mailbag." From these columns, the prisoners learned about recent trends, political events, and fads and shows currently in the public eye back home. Especially relished were the extracts from Dear John letters and ironic comments exhibiting the home folks' rosy misconceptions about life in a prison camp. Concerning the latter, the prisoners flew into a rage when they read "Hope you can get to Bayreuth for the opera season," or

"the Red Cross bulletin shows a picture of your swimming pool and the cabins in the pines. We hear you are living four in a room."³⁷

The Dear John letters that found their way into the newspapers were usually classic examples of tactlessness and insensitivity. The prisoners took sincere Dear John letters to heart but those that portrayed callousness or blatant infidelity were often posted on the bulletin board or in the newspaper so that others could express their contempt for the author or laugh at the irony that was so often visible in them. The January 10, 1944 issue of the Gefangenen Gazette offered these gems:

First letter from a fiance—"You were posted missing a month ago, so I got married"

From a fiance—"Darling, I have just married your father,"—
Love, Mother

The prisoners managed to keep fairly well informed about entertainment and sports activities back home. The pages of their newspapers are filled with brief notations such as:

Perhaps you left the states before it became Sinatra conscious. As a lean, unprepossessing young man, he croons, and the teenage girls hit the floor in a swoon. Now, as a psychological question mark, this Lucky Strike singer has every other radio program on the air taking potshots at him, as the man with 'big ears and a bedroom voice.'

Bob Hope, as usual, never is the one to miss a target. Sinatra and family had an eight pound baby boy a while ago, and Hope said it was the first time a man ever had a son bigger than he was.³⁸

³⁷ Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3B(15).

³⁸ Gefangenen Gazette, April 26, 1944.

A follow up story on January 24, 1945 reported:

Sinatra Retires: The "Voice," Sinatra, has retired from motion pictures. He said, "Pictures stink, most of the people in them do too," is one statement that arrived here by mail. He plans, however, to continue living in Hollywood.

The reporters were always looking for the unusual, and they often found it in the form of crazes or in the exhibition of unusual talent. For a time in Center Compound hypnosis became a fad due to the abilities of one prisoner, a student of medical hypnotic therapy, who volunteered to teach others his mysterious skills. On another occasion ventriloquists created quite a stir. An article printed in the Gefangenen Gazette on August 20, 1944 was headlined: "Ventriloquism: Latest Prank Threatens Camp Sanity," and read:

For preservation of the remaining fragments of sanity in the Center Camp, the beckoning and bewildering voices that have plagued kriegies for the past weeks, come out of Block 43. It all dates back, as does most of America's deviltry, to Texas. This overworked phrase of ventriloquism was dropped on Germany in the person of "Tex" Shackleford.

When the monotony of the barracks grew on, Tex resorted to this odd prank, but the blase old timers refused the bait. Unabashed, Tex waited patiently—summer and new purges came in together.

Tex's initial success was the roping in of a naive novice—one Lt. G_____. It was after lights out—a voice from the outside requested Lt. G_____ on the outside. Still new and unnerved, fellow pranksters abetting, Lt. G_____ started to go out. With the immediate risk of a shooting coming up, the pranksters called the hastily dressed newcomer back.

This success brought to Tex a veritable throng of students. Art Pilley [and] Junior Wolfram, became the outstanding grads—but never appreciated by a few beleaguered innocents.

Pilley, still hysterical, [related] the anecdote about a new kriegie utilizing a stall in the midwest abort. Caught at his calling, the newcomer was perplexed at a call, apparently from

beneath, "Hey, up there—."

When the newcomer jumped to his feet, very agitated and startled and looked down the gap—observers said Pilley became hysterical beyond control and had to utilize a box himself!

Incidents come to the surface daily, but the mental pressure must be avoided—so thanks Tex, Art and Junior for the unselfish disclosures—and the subsequent offers to teach anyone in camp the novel knack of ventriloquism.

'That's right [Tex, Art and Junior], no one was calling you!'

The favorable impact articles such as this had upon the morale of the prisoners can well be imagined.

Mail

According to Colonel Goodrich, mail was "probably the most important single factor in [the prisoner's existence]."³⁹ As another source put it, "Mail and personal parcels were our spiritual reminder that we still lived in the future and that somewhere, somehow, there were persons who had not forgotten us entirely."⁴⁰ Precisely because it was so important, the presence or absence of mail could bolster or depress the entire camp, and the uncertainties surrounding its arrival served as the focal point of much of the prisoners' discontent and the subject of many complaints to the Protecting Power.

Prisoners could send allocated quantities of mail each month:

Generals	5 letter & 5 post cards
Other officers	3 letters & 4 post cards

³⁹Charles G. Goodrich to Maurice Pate, Director, Prisoners of War Relief, National Headquarters, American Red Cross, Washington, D.C., March 22, 1944, "Stalag Luft III" Folder, "Camp Reports-Germany-Stalag Luft" File, Record Group 389.

⁴⁰Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part I, Section 2b.

NCOs & other ranks
Sanitary Personnel &
Clergy

2 letters & 4 post cards

Double the number permitted to their corresponding rank in the services⁴¹

The prisoners' outgoing mail had to pass two censors. First, the mail was screened by a designated prisoner in each block to ensure that the author of the letter was not revealing any important information to the Germans or stating something which would be useful to the German propaganda effort or disheartening to relatives and friends back home. Then it was handed over to the German censors who struck out anything casting a negative image on Germany or which appeared to be designed to pass on information in code. The Block censors in Center Compound returned an average of twenty letters a day to the writers because they were written in a sour tone or were filled with self-pity. Such letters were often composed in response to impressions gained from comments received in mail from home. In November 1943, for example, numerous letters arrived from the United States which revealed very negative impressions about American prisoners of war. One wife wrote to her prisoner husband "I still love you darling although you are a coward." Another prisoner received a pair of wool socks with a Red Cross parcel which had a note bearing the name and address of the contributor. He wrote a letter thanking the lady for knitting the socks and she replied "Sorry, but I made the socks for a member of the armed forces, not a prisoner of war." In return, the prisoners wrote a barrage of stinging replies. The letters were intercepted by Block censors, and the prisoners were reminded once again of the need to

⁴¹George Tait, First Secretary, American Legation, Bern, Switzerland to Secretary of State, May 11, 1943, File No. 740.00114EW/3604, Record Group 59.

write cheerful letters to their next-of-kin.⁴²

There were no restrictions on the number of letters prisoners could receive from home. The absence of any restriction in this regard made the prisoners extremely suspicious when month after month went by and they received little or no mail. Many men waited six months to receive their first letter, and the average time en route for letters varied greatly, ranging from three to four weeks up to many months.⁴³ The anxieties created among the prisoners by these delays profoundly influenced the tenor of life in the camp and added tremendously to the hostile feelings the prisoners held toward the Germans since they concluded that most of the delay was intentionally brought about by the censors or other personnel in the German administration. Some prisoners received their mail regularly. Others suffered through lengthy "dry spells" only to be suddenly deluged with a backlog of outdated letters. One officer received one hundred and twelve letters in two days.⁴⁴

⁴²Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part I, Section 2b, and Part III (Diary), November 28, 1943, December 2-3, 1943.

⁴³The average length of time it took for letters to arrive in Center Compound from the countries indicated was as follows:

<u>Country</u>	<u>Time</u>
United Kingdom	61 days
Canada	13 weeks
United States	14 weeks
Australia	16 weeks
New Zealand	15 weeks
South Africa	11 weeks

Source: Ibid., Part I, Section 2b.

⁴⁴Gefangenen Gazette, December 19, 1943.

The frequency of the prisoners' complaints suggest that the Germans must have taken some liberties with the mail, but there were many extenuating circumstances which accounted at least in part for the delays. It must be remembered that virtually all the mail for the Luftwaffe camps was censored at Stalag Luft III, and that the workload at times became overwhelming. The Germans noted that some of the correspondence from home tended to ramble on and on, often about inconsequential matters, which slowed the censoring process. The Germans also pointed out that many of the letters were improperly addressed and therefore remained en route for great lengths of time. Ample publicity was given in the United States to the effect that the proper address for the prisoners was:

Kriegsgefangenenpost
1Lt. GEORGE WEBSTER
Kriegsgefangenennummer 1391
Germany, Stalag Luft III

And yet, the mail addressed to prisoners in Stalag Luft III often revealed errors in the address block that varied widely, such as:

Kriegsgefangen NO. 3 D. L. Inpostlager
M - Stammalger Lutz
Saglet Luff
Ftenlager
Kriegsgefangen Nr. der Luftwaffe
Stammalger Luft
Stagjug
Stall A. G.⁴⁵

And finally, there were delays in the delivery of mail because of the disruption of the transportation system in Germany. The possible explanations given here for the delays in no way diminish the significance

⁴⁵American Charge d'Affairs at Bern to Secretary of State, January 5, 1945, File No. 711.62114 MAIL/1-545, Record Group 59 [Diplomatic Branch, National Archives].

of the anguish experienced by the prisoners. They merely serve to put the mail controversy into perspective. The prisoners might have gained an even better perspective of the problem if they had known that German prisoners in America often had to wait one year for their mail because of the "poor censoring set-up in the States."⁴⁶

Entertainment

The prisoners in Stalag Luft III created and enjoyed an amazing spectrum of entertainment activities. Not having to work, they had ample time to develop their considerable talents to amuse themselves and others, and the results were clearly visible in their fine performances in theatrical productions, musical concerts, radio programs, and a wide range of hobbies and crafts. The prisoners constructed their own theaters, either from the foundation up or by modifying existing buildings, and spent considerable time in them. As in so many other facets of life in Stalag Luft III, the prisoners were surprised by the amount and caliber of talent that existed within their ranks. Individuals with experience as professional actors and musicians led and participated in the entertainment programs in virtually every compound. The programs served several purposes. Long hours of practice consumed time that otherwise would have weighed

⁴⁶The report of the delay in mail to German prisoners in the States was made by an unnamed Red Cross representative who visited Center Compound on May 22, 1944. Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part III (Diary), May 22, 1944. Though this information was obviously available to the camp leaders who talked to the representative, there is no indication that the average prisoner was aware of this assertion. Even if they had been told, it is unlikely that they would have believed it since the prevailing view in Stalag Luft III was that the prisoners in America were pampered.

heavily on the prisoners. The various performances gave the prisoners innumerable outlets for constructive self-expression. And the entire entertainment program diverted the prisoners' attention for varying lengths of time and added important features of "normal" community life to their environment.

Music was very important to the prisoners, and it absorbed a great deal of their time and attention in terms of both individual and group effort. Interest in music manifested itself in several ways. The prisoners tried to attain some familiarity with the latest songs at home through the new prisoners. They also received recordings through the Y.M.C.A. and played them at record concerts in the theater, out of doors, and in their rooms. The gramophones also came from the Y.M.C.A. and, although there never seemed to be enough gramophones (often the limited number was further reduced by the breakage of main springs and the wearing down of needles), the prisoners managed to circulate them enough so that each room could enjoy its own private record session about once a month. Records would be played well into the evening, and usually one of the men in the bottom bunks would continue to place discs on the machine after the lights went out so that the others could go to sleep to the sound of their favorite tunes.

The Y.M.C.A. supplied enough instruments to permit each compound to form its own band, and by careful scheduling, most compounds were able to support several bands, including a dance or jazz band, a concert orchestra, and a junior band or orchestra.⁴⁷ Sheet music

⁴⁷ A typical orchestra was composed of first and second violins, viola, clarinets, trombones, saxophones (playing horn parts), cello,

came from the same source, although the prisoners themselves wrote a considerable amount of music. In many cases they sat down with an instrument and worked out familiar songs note by note; at other times they composed their own renditions or wrote entirely new orchestrations. If the men could acquire one copy of anything, they recopied it by hand until everyone in the band was supplied.

Each compound took great pride in its musical groups, most of which had names such as the "Sagan Serenaders," the "Luftbandsters," and the "Flying Syncopaters." Concerts were often presented in other compounds, thus increasing the amount of exposure given each group and allowing longer runs for particular shows. In November 1943 Major C. R. Diamond, a past member of the Philharmonics, was allowed to take his "Glen Miller Band" to North Compound where it performed on four successive days. Following a huge success there, the band moved to the Central Compound where they played three or four scheduled programs to a wildly enthusiastic mixed audience of Americans and British. After the third performance, while walking back to South Compound, the band played "America" while in front of the Kommandantur and all the prisoners within hearing distance cheered loudly. The Kommandant promptly cancelled the remaining performance and put a ban on all further practice in South Compound for four weeks, saying that the men were not very tactful in their sudden burst of

bass trumpets, bassoon, flute, piano, and drums. Agenda for Meeting with YMCA Representative in Stalag Luft III on July 14, 1943, "Education and Entertainment" Folder, "Stalag Luft III" File, "Prisoner of War" Drawer, Research Division, Air Force Museum, Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio.

patriotism.⁴⁸

The prisoners also organized numerous choirs for church and general entertainment. Organized and spontaneous "sing alongs" were held, and were especially frequent when the compounds first opened and more formal presentations had not yet been organized.

The compound theaters served as the focal point of the prisoners' formal entertainment world, and they spared no effort in making the facilities and equipment as authentic as possible. Canadian Red Cross boxes provided the wood for the approximately three hundred seats built by the prisoners for each of the theaters. German blankets served as the basic material for the curtains, which were often decorated with tassels made from unwoven socks. Carefully preserved wrapping paper provided the background material for stage sets constructed on wood slats that were used over and over again. Nails were often used ten or twenty times before being discarded. Spotlights with tin reflectors were rigged into the ceiling. Oleo-margarine was used for grease paint. Costumes were either handmade or rented from Berlin at extravagant prices. The general policy was for the prisoners to offer some form of entertainment in the theater every night. This did not mean that each prisoner could attend every night. Most performances had to be given three or four times in order to accommodate everyone in the compound. Among the offerings were

⁴⁸The prisoners do not agree on what song was played that day, some saying it was "God Save the King" instead of "America." But they all agree that the Germans overreacted since German prisoners in the States were allowed to sing patriotic songs while marching down American streets. See Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part III (Diary), November 26 and 29, 1943 for accounts that differ slightly with the one given above.

classical, jazz, swing, and popular music concerts, public debates and lectures, record concerts, mock radio programs, variety shows, and theatrical productions.

The radio shows resembled stateside broadcasts in every possible detail, again even to the point of including advertisements. Going under the call sign "WPOW" in Center Compound and "KRGY" in South Compound, the shows were aired over public address systems supplied by the Y.M.C.A. An article in the October 23, 1944 edition of the Circuit describes the radio broadcasts in South Compound:

SOUTH CAMP'S STATION KRGY FEATURES FAMILIAR TO POWS;

It's 4,000 miles as the "Big Ones" fly from Sagan, Germany to the throbbing heart of the entertainment world which feeds "all four" radio networks of America from studios high above Manhattan.

But here "Behind the wire," standard American broadcasts have spanned the miles to bring music, drama, news and education to POWs who are thereby transported from South Theatre to the familiar haunts of home.

It's amazing what can be done with a few Y.M.C.A. records, a baby upright piano, an assortment of camp talent, and the day's German communique.

These are skilfully built into the day's program structure by Director Jim Aubele of WHK-WCLE, Cleveland, whipped into shape by Continuity Chief Dick "Ross" Rossignol of Mutual Hollywood and produced by voices coached by Chief Announcer Ted Brown of Roanoke's WSLS.

Technical problems involving the Y.M.C.A. sound equipment were worked out by D. H. Carey and Don Murchie.

The staff includes such capables as Bill Nance, Jack Mann, Kurt Langberg, Ray Rahner, Joe Rose, Lee Pilert, Jim Roberts, and John Torland, all voices behind the scenes of that familiar ringing phrase:

'KRGY, an overseas division of the American Broadcasting System.'⁴⁹

The many theatrical productions given in Stalag Luft III ranged from the very amateurish to some that most observers classified as strictly professional in spite of the total absence of women playing female roles. Most of the compounds produced one or more Shakespearean plays that featured excellent portrayals, elaborate stage props, and fine costumes from Berlin, all of which amazed and thrilled the initially skeptical audiences. At the other extreme were the original one-act plays put on by each barrack in Center Compound in a series of play competitions inspired by the wish to keep the prisoners busy and to encourage interest and participation in theater productions. Even the latter presentations, wherein most of the actors had never set foot on a stage before, were labeled "highly successful." A list of some of the plays produced in the various compounds includes:

Dover Road	As You Like It
The First Mrs. Fraser	Charlie's Aunt
Juno and the Paycock	Arsenic and Old Lace
The Bishop's Candlesticks	The Amazing Dr. Critterhouse
The Man Who Came to Dinner	Strictly from Hunger
The Invisible Duke	Veni, Vidi, Vici
Front Page	Boy Meets Girl
Petrified Forest	Kiss and Tell
Philadelphia Story	The Monkey's Paw
Midnight at the Mermaid	Hamlet

Variety and comedy shows were most popular with the prisoners. A variety show presented in West Compound included the following features:

⁴⁹As reprinted in R. W. Kimball and Oliver Chiesl, Clipped Wings (n.p., by the author, n.d.), n.p.

THEME - "The Prisoner's Song".....Band
 "SUNDAY.....Band
 MASTER OF CEREMONIES.....Mike Wyse
 "SOLITUDE".....Band
 "HARVARD SQUARE.....Band
 "UNCLE SAM GETS THE BLAME".....Harmaniacs
 "TRAINS IN THE NIGHT.....Band
 "IMPRESSIONISTIC DANCE.....Zip Zapinski
 "WHITE CHRISTMAS - Vocal.....Johnny Murphy
 "MOONLIGHT SONATA.....Band
 "ROCKIN THE BLUES.....Band
 "THEY'RE EITHER TOO YOUNG.....Harmaniacs
 "THEY'LL NEVER BELIEVE ME - Vocal....John Palmer
 "SIBONEY.....Band
 "ALBERT - M.C.....Mike Wyse
 "YOU MADE ME LOVE YOU.....Mot Williams and Band
 "NIGHT AND DAY.....Band
 "EL RANCHO GRANDE.....Jerry 'Miranda' Leichtman
 "SLEEP.....Band
 "MEXICAN HAT DANCE.....Band
 "STREET VENDER ACT - M.C.....Mike Wyse
 "SUGAR BLUES.....Tex Newton and Band
 "THE EARL.....Band
 "ST. LOUIS BLUES.....Band. 50

The prevalence of the "airman's language" often gave these performances a flavor all their own. A January 5, 1944 article in the Gefangenen Gazette described an upcoming extravaganza:

"Flieger Frolic," piloted by Jack Wade, "taxi out to take off" the end of this month. This big vehicle clears the runway wing tanks abrim with laughing gas and full bomb load of music, horse-play and dancing.

A full crew of comedians and musicians will handle the "gagantic" aircraft. Wally Kinnan and his boys control musical communication, sending a Johnny Ward "jiveocycle" frequency, as Gen Blue and the Three Stooges, White, Jerome, and Morris, "let go" with detonation dialogue and evasive vocal action. Master of Ceremonies, Robert Reginer, lays down a steady fire of dum dum chatter, Bill Couhihan raises manifold pressure with a "taxi-strip-tease." Costumes by Lt. Tabor and stage settings by Sgt. Elliot

⁵⁰Diary of 2nd Lt. George Wenthe, copy in author's possession. Original held by Mr. Wenthe.

complete the leadship lineup for a riotous rendezvous and a mirthful mission.

Entertainment was one facet of prisoner life which was perhaps enhanced by the separation of the Americans and British into different compounds. The Americans did not seem to appreciate British humor, and one suspects the opposite was also true.⁵¹ At one point the British and Americans in Center Compound came close to blows as a result of an argument over the use of the theater. The problem and the manner in which it was resolved is described in the December 1, 1943 entry of the Center Compound Diary:

Highly strained Anglo-American relations in the camp theatre staff were diplomatically solved today by Colonel Spivey when the American and British theatre managers agreed that they would work together and forget past differences. The men were very persistent and headstrong in the ideas they had concerning Center Compound productions. Once they were on speaking and working terms there was much joking and wise-cracking as each unearthed "tons" of equipment and material including costumes and paints, which each buried and hid when the feud over the theatre management started.⁵²

A few movies also appeared in camp from time to time. Some of them were German films, but the prisoners attentively watched them anyway. Approximately six or seven American or British films were viewed by the men, a few of the titles being "The Spoilers," "Shall We Dance," and "Bringing Up Baby."⁵³

⁵¹Spivey, "History."

⁵²Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part III (Diary), December 1, 1943.

⁵³Spivey, "History."

The prisoners evidenced immense enthusiasm when it came time to go to the theater. It marked an occasion in their lives when they consciously or unconsciously shined their shoes and dressed in their best clothes in preparation for the few moments in which they could mentally transport themselves outside the wire. Tickets were given out by allotment with front row seats being reserved for the "brass" and visiting "dignitaries," many of whom were German, Y.M.C.A., and Red Cross officials. The audience was ushered to their reserved seats. After each major performance the prisoners could read critical reviews of the productions in the compound newspapers. All these factors created a festive environment which the prisoners valued highly, and the success of the entertainment programs went far toward easing the discomforts of captivity.

Athletics

Perhaps no other camp activity matched sports in terms of stimulating mass participation and widespread interest. As one observer noted at the time he visited Stalag Luft III, "the men are young and spend most of their time at games."⁵⁴ The prisoners were wise to devote so much attention to athletics, for in addition to occupying their time and taking their minds off the everyday hardships encountered in camp, the heavy emphasis on sports accounted in large part for the remarkably good state of health among the prisoners. The prisoners in Stalag Luft III were fully aware of the fact that

⁵⁴Report of Gunnar Jansson, War Prisoners' Aid of the YMCA, May 27, 1943, "Stalag Luft III" Folder, "Camp Reports-Germany-Stalag Luft" File, Record Group 389.

they were more fortunate than prisoners in other camps, as indeed they could hardly help but be since they were constantly reminded that "with regard to sports [Stalag Luft III] is the best equipped [camp] in Germany."⁵⁵ And the men repeatedly expressed their heart-felt gratitude for the generous aid given them by the Y.M.C.A. and the Red Cross. What did raise their ire, however, was the mistaken image many people had that Stalag Luft III was a country club adorned with swimming pools and golf courses.

Explanations for the public's erroneous impressions are not hard to find. In keeping with the policy of writing cheerful letters home, few really negative reports of the camp got beyond the military and State Department. A Red Cross bulletin published monthly for the benefit of next-of-kin contributed to the false image by printing pictures of one or two isolated swimming pools which the public interpreted as a prominent feature of every camp. Again, the bulletin sought to allay the fears of the folks back home and tried to highlight the most positive aspects of life in captivity. And finally, most people did not understand the manner in which the prisoners often bolstered their own morale by pretending their makeshift facilities were in fact the real thing. Thus a small and sometimes dirty fire pool became a swimming pool, and a tortuously twisted path in the sand became a nine-hole golf course. Such misunderstandings aside, however, the athletic program in Stalag Luft III was indeed something to be marveled at and appreciated.

⁵⁵Report of visit made on February 22, 1943 by Mr. Friedrich and Dr. Bubb, delegates of the International Red Cross, File No. 740.00114EW/3977, Record Group 59.

The prisoners engaged in a variety of sports according to the season. Among the British and Dominion troops, cricket, rugby, and soccer were the most popular. The Americans preferred softball and football. In the winter ice skating and hockey consumed everyone's attention, although the winter of 1943-1944 was exceptionally mild and made the maintenance of a rink difficult. In addition to these major sports, individuals and small groups played volleyball and basketball, organized track events, and practiced boxing, wrestling, weight lifting, and fencing. And there were, in fact, several golf courses laid out in the sand between the barracks. It is doubtful, however, if one complete set of clubs existed in the entire camp, and the balls were usually made out of tightly wound leather taken from old shoes or other old balls. In spite of these handicaps, golf was a very popular sport and the limited facilities were almost always in steady use, East Compound alone reporting over three hundred playing members.⁵⁶

The large number of participants utilized their limited equipment and playing areas well. When good weather prevailed, the sports fields were usually taken up with scheduled play from morning until dark. Each of the compounds had highly organized clubs and divided the players into leagues for the major sports with each barrack supplying one or more teams. South Compound boasted three softball leagues—a Major League, a Minor League, and a beginners Sandlot League. Among them they played five games a day, six days a week,

⁵⁶Report of Wing Commander Ryder, East Compound Sports Officer, in the agenda for the September 30, 1943 Y.M.C.A. Conference, "Education and Entertainment" Folder, "Stalag Luft III" File, "Prisoners of War" Drawer, Research Division, Air Force Museum, Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio.

and involved more than four hundred players. Sunday afternoons were devoted to feature games—usually played in uniforms received from the Y.M.C.A.—by the outstanding players in the camp. Many teams took on vocational images, such as "crack pilot versus bombardier," and "fighter pilot versus bomber pilot" teams. The amount of competitive interest aroused in the Major League is attested to by the practice of encouraging the better players to move from one barracks to another to strengthen a ball club, and by the eager recruiting among new arrivals.⁵⁷ Numerous bets were staked on the outcomes. In West Compound, Barracks 163 became the "champs" in the summer of 1944, and as a result of their final victory over Barracks 158 they collected 62 D-Bars (Army ration chocolate), 61 packs of U.S. cigarettes and 2 cigars for the loyal rooters of Barracks 163. In September they collected a further 82 D-Bars and 120 packs of cigarettes from the occupants of Barracks 165 who had sponsored a team in a challenge match.⁵⁸ Sometimes the Americans would make so much noise during the games that the British would climb on top of their huts to watch from afar. The Germans also found the competition interesting, and the Kommandant often came to watch the games, reportedly applauding vigorously by beating his cane on his leather boot.⁵⁹

Individuals decided for themselves whether they wanted to participate in organized sports, but in Center Compound, and one suspects

⁵⁷Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part I, Section 3A(5).

⁵⁸Neary, Stalag Luft III: Sagan, 11.

⁵⁹Spivey, "History," 85.

this might have been true in the other compounds too, everyone was required to obtain some form of exercise each day unless he was ill or injured. A mandatory fifteen-minute calisthenics session was held each morning, and sometime during the day most of the men took several walks around the "circuit," the beaten path that ran around the entire circumference of each compound just inside the warning wire. Near the end of the war, Colonel Spivey calculated that he had walked the circuit over two thousand times for a total distance well in excess of twelve hundred miles, not to mention the three or four miles a day he normally walked in the performance of his duties.⁶⁰

It is not surprising, then, that the men managed to stay in good physical condition in spite of their confinement. A measure of their fitness can be seen in the outcome of a track meet held in East Compound on July 24, 1943, wherein the indicated results were attained:

100 yards	10 3/5 sec.
220 yards	24 4/5 sec.
440 yards	55 3/10 sec.
880 yards	2 min. 6 sec.
1 mile	5 min. 1 sec.
Cricket Ball	104 yards
Discus	114 ft. 11 1/2 in.
Weight (11 lbs)	42 feet
High Jump	5 ft. 4 in.
Long Jump	18 ft. 10 in. ⁶¹

When food rations were decreased in the latter half of 1944, the prisoners' physical stamina diminished. The emphasis on physical

⁶⁰Ibid., 87.

⁶¹R. Kellet, Commander of East Compound, to Sir Richard Howard-Vyse, Chairman, Prisoner of War Department, British Red Cross Society, August 25, 1943, File No. 619.2/08, "Reports and Statistics, American and Allied Internees and POW," Archives Division, National Headquarters, American Red Cross, Washington, D.C.

conditioning remained, however, as the men realized the need to remain as fit as possible in the event they were forced to march to a new location or were faced with the danger of extermination by the Germans who were becoming increasingly desperate as the war drew to a close. The diligence displayed by the prisoners paid rich dividends when they were forced to march westward in January 1945. Even if these dangers had not existed, however, the athletic programs and physical conditioning practices engaged in by the prisoners would have been worthwhile. They constituted another important ingredient in the brighter side of the men's lives, and contributed immeasurably to their good health and general sense of well-being.

Miscellaneous Activities

A host of unorganized activities also brightened the prisoners' lives. Various forms of gambling and rackets enticed the men to wager portions of their meager resources. Card games occupied the prisoners throughout the long winter months. Numerous hobbies and arts and crafts projects also found adherents.

Gambling and racket schemes repeatedly appeared in spite of the fact that they were officially banned. In November 1943 an officer from the Bronx introduced a "numbers racket" in Center Compound. The camp administration, Foodaco, and the camp newspapers all frowned on his scheme because it threatened to monopolize the camp's medium of exchange—chocolate bars and cigarettes—and the first immediate result would have been the end of Foodaco. The Bronx promoter planned to net ten per cent of all the cigarettes and D-Bars in the lottery, which would be run daily. Statisticians in the compound figured the whole market, including the reserve held by Foodaco, would

be in the hands of the Bronx promoter within a month.⁶²

Colonel Spivey repeatedly reminded the prisoners of the unique circumstances existing in a prison camp and that even though money had little value behind barbed wire there were some unscrupulous men who would not hesitate to take every cent a fellow officer had earned while a prisoner. He said that predated checks should not be given and that there was no guarantee that they would be honored upon their return home. He urged that the men use their common sense and keep all card games on a friendly basis.⁶³

The men generally seemed to have heeded his advice. There were exceptions, however, as indicated by the story of the man who ran up a debt of five million cigarettes. Another example involved money, but if anything it speaks in favor of the prisoners' basic sense of honor. As the end of the war approached, numerous pools were begun based on the closest guess of when the war would end. One such pool organized in Center Compound called for fifty individuals to put up twenty dollars each in the form of checks written on banks back in the United States. The checks were handwritten, many times on old scraps of paper, but the officer winning the lottery was able to cash all but two of them, netting him \$960.00 out of the \$1,000.00 pot. In fact, most debts incurred in camp seem to have been honored

⁶²Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part III (Diary), November 13, 1943.

⁶³Ibid., December 20, 1944.

after the war.⁶⁴

In spite of the scarcity of materials and tools with which to work, hobbies and handicraft projects abounded in Stalag Luft III. Ingenuity was exercised in turning the crudest materials into fine finished projects. Lead from the beads of tin cans was patiently gathered, melted, and poured into carefully carved molds to make military insignia. Old socks were unraveled to obtain yarn from which new stocking caps or other socks were made. Model cars, boats, and airplanes were constructed. Model airplane flying provided opportunities for men to exhibit their skills in mock air-to-air combat with bystanders throwing sand and pebbles to simulate antiaircraft fire. Major Simoleit was especially impressed with a little steamboat that one of the prisoners made which actually worked and steamed across the water with its paddle wheel churning to the accompaniment of a little puff of smoke coming from its stacks.⁶⁵ Many of the prisoners learned to play musical instruments or draw and paint while in captivity. A favorite pastime was for a prisoner to draw squares across a pin-up picture or some photograph or scene that he was particularly fond of and do the same on a vacant wall in preparation for painting of a mural. Most of the prisoners also had logbooks which they kept with diligence, and more than a few tried their hand at writing essays and poetry. The quality of their work varied greatly,

⁶⁴Interviews with Robert E. Broach, winner of the lottery, April 19, 1975, and Royal D. Frey, former prisoner in Stalag Luft I, February 25, 1975.

⁶⁵"Kriegsgefangenenlager nr. III der Luftwaffe," unpublished manuscript enclosed in Simoleit to Spivey, December 19, 1968, Simoleit Folder, Spivey Collection.

but enough good items appeared to warrant periodic craft shows. One of the best examples of their poetry reads:

Willie Green's Flying Machine

This is the fable of Willie Green
Who invented a kriegie flying machine.
'Tis as weird a tale as ever you heard
Yet I'll swear by the truth of every word.

The man who first heard it, suspicious as I,
Swore by his chocolate 'twas all a great lie.
But imagine his surprise, the gleam in his eyes,
When Willie's machine was seen to fly.

The parts were gathered-'tis no secret now-
But Willie alone knows the secret how.
They were hidden away in corners and places
While he carved away on the spars and braces.

The tin can piles were low indeed
When W. G. performed his deed.
There still is talk of that famous day
As the last Klim-tin was hidden away.

The engine was the first of the plane to be made
With crankshaft of steel from the missing spade.
While in Klim-can cylinders with mighty sound
The butter can pistons went up and down.

The flashy propeller so aerodynamic
Was carved from a board in the barracks attic.
While the peculiar strand that made the ignition
Was a length of barbed-wire from the compound partition.

Fuel was no problem to a man with a head
And Willie got gas from cabbage and bread.
In case of emergency, Willie held
The thing could easily be Rocket-propelled.

The side of the bed the fuselage made
The stick, the handle of the fore-mentioned spade.
The instruments, it could be seen at a glance
Was none other than the seat of Willie's pants.

Two locker doors the wings did make
With dihedral taper and negative rake.
And a Red Cross box from a racket source
Served as the tail for his flying horse.

The questions of wheels was mighty hot
Till Willie remembered the communal pot.
While Kriegies were wondering how it disappeared
Willie's machine became tricycle geared.

There were no guns on Willie's steed
 Its only defense was its excessive speed.
 To weight down the tail our hero used
 A size "12" pair of British shoes.

And when it was done our Willie cried
 "Enough, enough, I'm satisfied."
 And one dark night when conditions were best
 Willie's machine was put to the test.

The prop turned over, the engine caught
 "Aha," said Willie, "'twas not for naught."
 The plane jumped forward, started to fly
 And was over the fence in the wink of an eye.

The guard yelled "Verboten" and started to shoot
 But all his efforts were as good as "Kapoot."
 Willie flew on and into the dark
 Toward Ellis Island and Battery Park.

The plane flew on until Willie spied
 The lights that marked the other side.
 He felt so good and oh so free
 His Red Cross box fell into the sea.

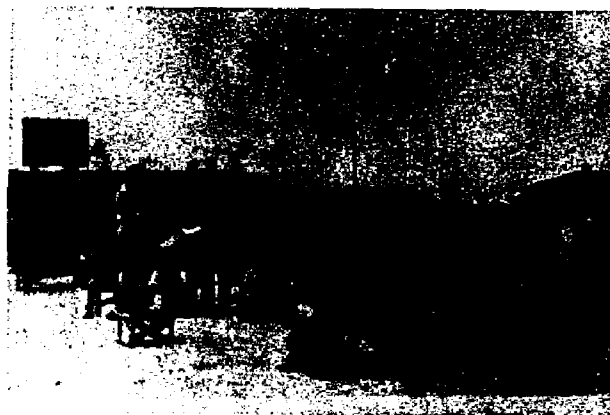
A crowd was there when he landed his crate
 "Where am I?" he asked, "It sure looks great."
 "Why where," they cried, "were you headed for?"
 "This my boy-----is STALAG LUFT IV."⁶⁶

There was a brighter side of life in Stalag Luft III, and the prisoners made the most of it. The Y.M.C.A. provided the bulk of the equipment used by the men in their numerous "leisure time" pursuits, and the prisoners expressed their sense of gratitude to the Y.M.C.A. at every opportunity. The wide range of religious, educational, entertainment, and athletic activities available in Stalag Luft III earned for that camp the reputation of being the "country club" of the prison camps. It may have appeared like a country club in comparison to some of the more poorly run camps, but in terms of what a prisoner

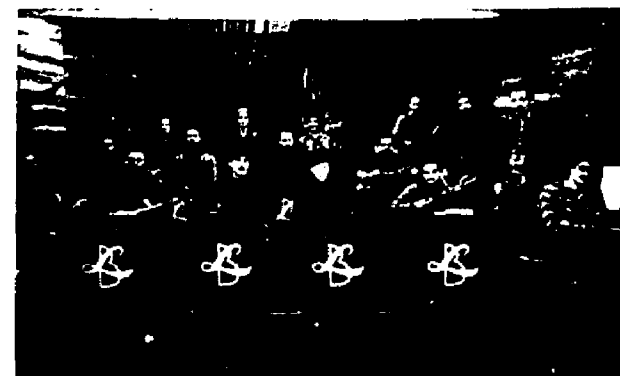
⁶⁶The author of this poem is unknown and may not have lived in Stalag Luft III. The poem, however, is found in a booklet that deals almost exclusively with South Compound and the poem, therefore, likely was written by someone confined there. See Kimball and Chiesl, Clipped Wings, n.p.



HOCKEY GAME IN SOUTH
COMPOUND



OUTDOOR CONCERT
JULY 4, 1944



THE "LUFTEANDSTERS"



NORTH COMPOUND THEATER



SPECTATORS AT SPORTS
EVENT IN NORTH COMPOUND
-NOTE THE GERMAN GUESTS
IN THE TWO FRONT ROWS.



SHAKESPEARIAN PLAY-
NORTH COMPOUND.



TOP LEFT: REFERENCE LIBRARY

TOP RIGHT: NEWSROOM

BOTTOM LEFT: AIRCRAFT ENGINE
MECHANICS COURSE

PHOTOS COURTESY ALBERT F.
SIMPSON HISTORICAL RESEARCH
CENTER



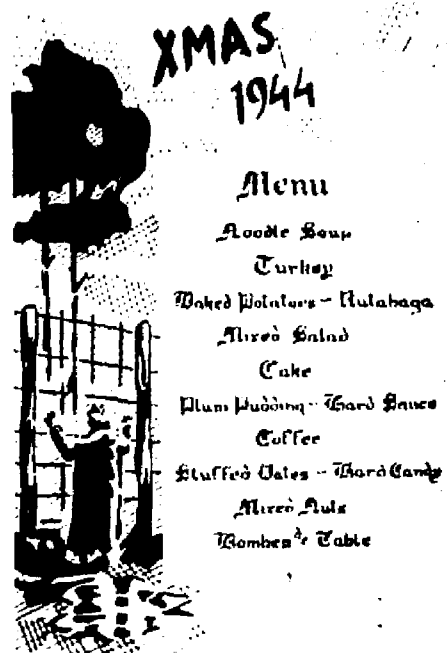
FIGURE 11



"GAMES OF CHANCE"
JULY 4, 1944



A CRAFT SHOW



HOLIDAY MENU -- THE
"TURKEY" DISH WAS
USUALLY SPAM CARVED TO
RESEMBLE A TURKEY



A KRIEGIE DRAWING

of war camp is supposed to offer captives, as specified in the Geneva Convention of 1929, Stalag Luft III was only the norm and not the exception. The Convention fully recognized the need for prisoners of war to be active in the normal human pursuits. The absence of other employment made leisure time activities both possible and necessary. The prisoner in Stalag Luft III made such excellent use of the limited diversions available to them that many people gained erroneous impressions about the camp, impressions which obscured the dismal and unpleasant realities of life in a prisoner of war camp.

CHAPTER XI

PRISONER COVERT ACTIVITIES AND GERMAN COUNTERMEASURES

Introduction

The covert activities undertaken in Stalag Luft III fell primarily into two categories—intelligence and escape. The hope of regaining one's personal freedom undoubtedly provided the initial impetus for escape, but the odds against success were so overwhelming that it is doubtful if anything more than sporadic and unorganized efforts would have been made if personal freedom had been the prisoners' only consideration. Without losing sight of the possibility of regaining freedom, most of the prisoners in Stalag Luft III were able to see that other worthwhile objectives might be achieved as a result of their escape activities. While still at Barth, the prisoners had come to the conclusion that escape comprised the one practical "operational mission" still available to them. Whether anyone made a "home run" to their native land or not, the mere attempt to do so caused the Germans no end of trouble and expense. As a group, the prisoners practiced the wisdom in President Lincoln's admonition to his Civil War generals that if they could not do the skinning they could at least hold a leg. They accepted as their operational mission the task of holding one leg of Germany on the home front hoping that they might thereby handicap her on the battlefield by forcing a diversion of manpower to guarding prisoners.

In order to translate this concept into reality, the prisoners organized their escape efforts and made escape their number one priority. In this sense, everything that went on in camp, whether it pertained to education, entertainment, allocation of Red Cross and Y.M.C.A. goods, or strict adherence to the chain of command, was designed with escape at least partially in mind. In spite of the close relationship between escape work and other camp activities, the magnitude of escape operations in Stalag Luft III dictates that they be discussed in a separate chapter and thus be artificially segregated, at least in part, from the other prisoner covert activities that are contrasted here with the full spectrum of German security measures as they apply to all prisoner undercover activities.

The task of gathering and disseminating intelligence was as important to the prisoners as escape work, but because of the dangers involved, only a few of them were allowed to engage in intelligence activities or learn the extent to which intelligence operations were being carried on in the camp. Reliable intelligence was essential to the success of the escape program. And in a very real sense, intelligence activities served as a second "operational mission" for the prisoners; the German war effort in fact was hurt as a result of information obtained in Stalag Luft III and transmitted back to England through covert means. Most importantly, however, the intelligence apparatus that the men formed and utilized in Stalag Luft III provided the information they needed to assess accurately their precarious situation as captives in the hands of the Nazis. As accounts of German atrocities became known to the prisoners, the conviction grew among them that their very survival depended upon their being able to anticipate German actions that could endanger the prisoners' lives.

This capability could be attained only by probing for clues and information that might indicate what the Germans were thinking and planning. In short, the prisoners engaged in espionage in an effort to aid the Allied cause by hindering the Germans and to protect themselves in the event the Germans should threaten their safety or their lives. Under international law, espionage is an offense punishable by death. This fact placed intelligence activities in a somewhat different category than escape; it never acquired the "game" aura so frequently associated with escape, and only a fraction of the prisoner population participated in intelligence work. It did fall into the same category as escape, however, when it came to influencing the tenor of life in the camp, for these two fields of covert activity—escape and intelligence—either affected or were affected by everything that went on in Stalag Luft III.

The Luftwaffe personnel in charge of the camp guarded the prisoners carefully in order to keep them from escaping or engaging in other undercover activities. Like the prisoners, the German administrators and guards learned from experience, as evidenced by the notably stricter security measures in force at Stalag Luft III when it opened in March 1942 than were present at Barth up to that time. And since the Germans continued to learn from their mistakes, intelligence and escape activities became increasingly difficult to carry out in succeeding years. It would be hard to pick a winner in the battle of wits between the prisoners and their guards. What can be said is that both sides exercised considerable ingenuity and imagination in the pursuit of their respective goals.

The German Security System

Over the years the Luftwaffe personnel in charge of prisoners developed a highly sophisticated system for guarding their captives and detecting their secret activities. Whenever possible, people performed the same duty over a long period of time so that their accumulated knowledge and experience would be fully utilized. The "ferrets," whose job was to uncover clandestine activities from inside the compound, were specially selected and trained. The Germans established an Escape Museum at Sagan to assist the ferrets in their efforts to learn every subterfuge and technique the prisoners had devised. The usual precautionary measures were observed with great diligence as evidenced by the care with which the Germans attempted to carry out their roll calls, barracks and compound searches, and the vigilance they exercised over the prisoners' daily activities.

Roll call, or Appell, was usually held twice a day, but when an escape had occurred or the Germans thought one was about to occur, three and sometimes four Appells were held throughout the day and during the night. Unless the weather was extremely inclement, the daytime Appells were usually held outdoors. During especially bad weather and during the night the count was taken in the barracks by room.

In theory, the Appells were designed to provide the Germans with an accurate count of the prisoners. The men fell out by barracks and either marched or walked onto the sports field where they lined up in five files that were arranged in a large, hollow square. The German Lager Officer walked around the inner side of the hollow square counting the number of men as he walked by. An Unteroffizier

(equivalent to a sergeant) assisted him by simultaneously passing to the rear of the Blocks and comparing his count with the officer's. The Blocks came to attention one at a time while being counted, the Block Commanders exchanging salutes with the German Lager Officer when he approached. There was a space of several yards between each block of men representing a barracks, and a smaller space between the occupants of each room. Armed guards were posted around the outside of the hollow square to intercept any prisoner who attempted to move from one group to another during the count. Before the parade each Barracks Commander had to prepare a list or "chit" giving the following information about the men assigned to his barracks:

- Number on parade from each room
- Number sick in each room
- Names of personnel working in Sick Quarters
- Names of personnel working in the Vorlager
- Names of personnel working in the theater
- Total number of personnel accommodated in the barracks

These chits were given to the Compound Adjutant who then presented them to the German Lager Officer. If the figures derived from the count did not match those indicated on the chits and those listed in the official camp roster, a recount was taken.

After the British and Americans were separated into different compounds, the Americans gradually adopted a different outlook toward the Appells than that which prevailed in the British compounds. The Americans concluded that since it was impossible to avoid having Appells, they would comply with the Germans' wish for an orderly assembly by using Appells to further their own ends in maintaining a high standard of discipline. The Americans, therefore, marched to Appell in formation and maintained relatively good order. The British,

on the other hand, tended to fall in for the count in a haphazard manner and, while one group of men was being counted, the others would mill about within their assigned area, kick the dirt with their feet, and talk to their neighbors, or engage in horseplay. The conduct of the British was not owing to a lack of discipline, although it did perhaps reflect the boredom these men felt at having to attend two or more Appells a day for weeks, months, and years on end. Rather, their haphazard approach was an integral part of their escape program. When a prisoner escaped, the first few hours were extremely important because his chances of success increased in proportion to the distance he traveled from camp before the alarm was sent out. By milling about, the British made it easier for a man from one group to slide over to another group and be counted twice, thus concealing the absence of the escaped prisoner during one, and sometimes several Appells.¹

There were times when the Americans, too, were uncooperative. Upon arrival in Center Compound in the summer of 1943, Colonel Spivey discovered that during Appells prisoners sometimes hid in various locations around the camp in an effort to confuse and inconvenience the Germans. Spivey put a stop to this practice since it only

¹The following sources were relied upon in this section unless otherwise noted: Charles G. Goodrich, "History of the USAAF, Prisoners of War of the South Compound, Stalag Luft III" (unpublished manuscript, 1945), Part I, Section 2B [Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Maxwell AFB, Alabama], hereinafter cited as "History of South Compound," and "A History of Stalag Luft III" (unpublished and un-attributed manuscript written ca. 1945), Part I, 3-5. Full details regarding the origins, authenticity, and present location of this document are found on Page 156, Footnote 1 of the present work.

prolonged the time the remaining men had to stand on the field.²

In another case the Americans staged a minor rebellion as a protest against the frequency of the Appells. After the mass escape from North Compound in March 1944, the Germans instituted a third Appell each day which was called without warning sometime between the two regular Appells, the object being to make undercover work more difficult. The prisoners in South Compound considered this an unjust nuisance since nobody in South Compound had been involved in the escape. They therefore decided upon a program of passive resistance and disorderly conduct during the extra Appell held on March 27. The assembled men stood about casually, smoked cigarettes, and failed to come to attention for the Lager Officer who found counting an impossible task and gave it up temporarily. Shortly thereafter the prisoners were summoned for another Appell, and this time the whole circumference of the parade ground was lined with German soldiers holding rifles and machine guns at readiness to fire. The prisoners wisely decided to cooperate and the Appell was completed without further incident. The protest was not without effect, however, as the unwanted extra Appell was soon discontinued and several Germans referred to the affair as being the sort of thing they wished to avoid if possible.

The Germans made night bed checks on a routine basis. One prisoner from South Compound recalled almost with a tinge of nostalgia

²Delmar T. Spivey, "History of Center Compound," (unpublished manuscript, 1946), 43, Spivey Collection [Special Collections Room, USAF Academy Library, Colorado], hereinafter cited as "History."

the sound of German boots echoing in the night to the accompaniment of the familiar "sing-singing" voice of a guard saying "Appell in zee night---eviryzing is awright---gudnight gentlemen!"³

The Germans also conducted frequent and thorough searches of the barracks. Sometimes a particular barracks seems to have been chosen at random while at other times the search was the obvious result of someone or something having aroused the Germans' suspicions. The usual procedure was for the Abwehr men to enter the Block in question during the morning Appell. When the prisoners returned from Appell, they would find guards posted around their barracks and were prohibited from entering their Block until mid-afternoon when the search was completed. The searches, which were almost always thorough, were conducted with additional vigor if the Germans had reason to believe that there were escape aids or other forbidden items such as a radio or camera on the premises. In search of such goods, they would tear open mattresses, remove sections of the walls, floors, and ceiling, clean out lockers and stoves, take books off shelves, and leave the rooms in a state of total disarray. It took the prisoners considerable time to clean up after the searches, and they angrily protested against the methods the searchers used, but to no avail.

In addition to these formal head counts and barracks searches, the Germans relied upon a variety of other methods for keeping track of their wards and curtailing the prisoners' covert activities. One common practice was to station men with field glasses behind brush

³R. W. Kimball and O. W. Chiesl, Clipped Wings (n.p., by the author, n.d.), n.p.

piles in the woods outside the wire in an effort to detect suspicious activities among the prisoners. One telltale sign the Germans looked for was the direction and density of the traffic patterns among the prisoners. If the number of people entering or leaving a particular barracks seemed to be too large, for example, the Germans immediately suspected that the prisoners were dispersing sand from that building or using it for other forbidden purposes and searched it soon afterwards. After a successful escape through the perimeter fence in September 1942, sentries were also placed on patrol outside the fence, and other sentries were placed in the woods at night. During the hours of darkness, patrols were carried out both inside and outside the compounds by Hundfuehrer, armed guards with specially trained dogs. The guards stationed in the sentry towers watched the prisoners from above while the ferrets observed the prisoners from their vantage points inside the compounds. The ferrets routinely probed underneath the barracks in search of tunnel openings and sometimes left twigs in positions they had marked so that it would be easy for them to tell whether the ground had been disturbed. At all times they looked for fresh earth in the cracks of floors or in the seams of prisoners' clothes and kept a constant check on the whole surface of a compound in order to tell whether earth from underground was being deposited in the open. Seismographs were installed in the ground by the fence to detect tunneling work, and many of the prisoners believed some of the rooms used for meetings were electronically bugged. Altogether, the Germans kept a close watch over the prisoners and their persistent efforts paid them rich dividends. In all likelihood, however, no matter how hard they tried, it would not have been hard enough. For

as one prisoner noted,

No soldier has ever had so strong an incentive to keep prisoners in as prisoners have to get out. If a prisoner of war devoted all his time and energy to making his plans he was likely to find a way out in the end. That did not mean that he reached home, but to some prisoners of war a few days' freedom were worth the effort of years.⁴

This statement certainly held true for the prisoners in Stalag Luft III, and it applied to more than just escape, for the prisoners approached almost all their covert activities with the same sense of purpose and dedication that is normally associated with escape: and to them their few, but by no means insignificant, successes seemed worth the years of effort.

Intelligence

Intelligence operations in Stalag Luft III were organized somewhat differently in each compound, but generally were designed to achieve similar results through the employment of proven techniques. The prisoners sought any information that would assist them in their escape work as well as military information that might help them assess their own situation or possibly be useful to their respective home governments. In order to obtain and properly disseminate this information, the men in each compound set up intelligence staffs capable of handling all the necessary details pertaining to such specialized functions as radio work, code messages, interrogations, contacts with the Germans, internal security, intercompound and inter-

⁴Aidan Crawley, Escape from Germany: A History of R.A.F. Escapes During the War (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), 18-19. Hereinafter cited as Escape.

camp communications, and escape intelligence.

The process of interrogating new prisoners has already been described (see pp. 216-219), but it should be noted here that the interrogations were designed to do more than merely check each prisoner's identity.⁵ Other information obtained during the interrogations included:

1. Details for casualty reports, such as:
 - a. How shot down, by flak or fighter, and what type of attack used if shot down by fighter
 - b. Altitude at time shot down
 - c. Where shot down
 - d. Whether aircraft caught fire in the air
 - e. Whether the casualty was due to the pilot being killed
 - f. Whether the final cause of the casualty was due to:
 1. Fire
 2. Loss of control
 3. Weather
 4. Engine
 5. Hit by own bombs
 - g. Whether the target was bombed, not bombed, or bombs jettisoned
 - h. Whether the aircraft was destroyed, not destroyed, or unknown
 - i. Any difficulties with escape hatches
 - j. Any secret equipment not destroyed
2. Military information seen or heard by the prisoner from the time of crash to the time of imprisonment, e.g. airdromes, factories, state of railways and rail traffic, morale, etc.
3. Description of the prisoner's interrogation by Germans, especially how the Germans knew of their unit, mission, secret equipment, etc.

⁵In at least one instance a German agent was exposed during the interrogation session. The Germans placed an Egyptian Air Force officer in North Compound, and the prisoners, not satisfied with his answers to certain questions, placed him under close arrest. After several days he broke down and admitted that he had been placed in the compound. After representations by the Senior British Officer to the Kommandant, the agent was removed from the camp. "A History of Stalag Luft III," Part I, 80.

4. Messages from Allied agents in civilian jails, and the conditions there and in concentration camps.⁶

Other categories of prisoners also were debriefed by members of the intelligence staff. Prior to escape attempts, selected men were asked to pay special attention to matters that could be of importance to the prisoners, such as train timetables, bomb damage, the attitudes of the German people toward prisoners, the state of German morale, and anything else that might possibly be significant. The practice of alerting the escapers in advance was necessary since the debriefers discovered that recaptured men who had not been briefed ahead of time were able to provide very little useful information, while those who had been asked to bring back information usually made valuable contributions. The same was true of men who traveled outside the camp on official business. Prisoners who attended funerals in the nearby cemetery, who went into Sagan to load Red Cross parcels, or who spent time in neighboring medical facilities were often able to bring back military information and special communications from foreign workers.

Perhaps the most important information came from the Germans themselves who revealed much to observant "contact men." Prisoners who spoke German fluently were given extra food and other valuable items which they used to bribe camp personnel. If a particular member of the camp staff possessed anti-Nazi sentiments, the bribes were hardly necessary, as was the case with "Corporal Harry." Harry was a genuine democrat who was prepared to take considerable risks to do

⁶Ibid., 66.

anything which he felt might bring an end to the Nazi regime. Once his confidence had been gained, he supplied a great deal of information and also made suggestions about British propaganda, which he listened to on the radio. He suggested that the lack of an Allied policy toward postwar Germany was having a bad effect upon the increasing number of Germans who, from the time of Stalingrad onward, realized that the war was lost. His access to various administrative offices enabled him to keep the prisoners well informed about orders from Berlin and about camp administration in general, and he regularly reported on changes in the regulations governing access to an exit from the compounds, alterations in passes, and changes in German personnel.⁷

Getting help and information from other Germans was more difficult. Usually a contact man was assigned to only one person, and it was his job to gain that individual's confidence over a period of time. To do this, the prisoner invited the German in for coffee or tea, offered him cigarettes and food, and talked to him at length about subjects of interest to the German party, such as his family or the problems and fears he encountered on his job. After good rapport had been established, the contact man asked the German for a small favor and, if this was forthcoming, increasingly larger ones. At some point the German was likely to refuse, at which time the prisoners were not above blackmailing him, since by this time the German had clearly compromised himself. The prisoners referred to Germans who

⁷Crawley, Escape, 42-43.

cooperated in this manner as "tamed" Germans. Information obtained from such individuals included:

Details of troop movements, locations and strengths

Locations of factories, the war material produced, the output and the number of workers

Locations of airfields, the strength of their ground and air defense, and the number and types of aircraft assigned

Experiments with new weapons and the locations of experimental sites and their defenses

The importance of local railways to transport troops and war materials

German reactions to different types of warfare, methods of attack and strategies, new weapons, and the effects of all these things on morale

Bomb damage, its extent and effect on production of war material and on morale

Internal economics, details of the cost of war, the shortage of food, raw materials, fuel, etc., and their effect on morale⁸

The information gathered from these and other sources, such as German newspapers and radio broadcasts, was collated, evaluated, and disseminated. Data that might be helpful to the prisoners' home governments were transmitted through coded letters, in casualty reports, inside pictures, and by personnel who visited the camp or by prisoners who were repatriated.

The coding effort that began in the early years of the war at Dulag Luft and Barth (see pp. 134-35) was continued and expanded at Stalag Luft III. About fifteen men coded letters at Barth, while the number of people involved at Sagan ranged from forty in South Compound

⁸Ibid., 64.

to over one hundred and seventy in the British compounds.⁹ The forty coders in South Compound sent out several hundred messages and received as many in return. Until 1943 the United States government evidenced little interest in this work, and the American prisoners were registered under the British system. In 1943 the U.S. War Department developed its own system, but it proved to be inferior to the British method, and the prisoners decided to continue to use the British system only, though the incoming messages were still drawn up according to the American plan.¹⁰ The coding work was carefully administered by the senior officers in each compound. They received reports from the various intelligence personnel, determined what information was worth transmitting, and then gave it to the coding section which condensed the data into short messages that never exceeded seventy-five letters in length. The same staff prepared the work for the letter writers by encoding the information and disguising it on card game score cards. The letter writer himself did not know what information he was transmitting, nor did he know the identity of the other writers. When he received a letter, he in turn gave it to the coding staff who decoded it and reported the results to the senior officer.¹¹

⁹Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part III, Sections 2 and 3; "A History of Stalag Luft III," Part I, 67-69. Figures are not available for Center and West Compounds, and it is not known in which of the three British compounds the above listed men worked.

¹⁰Goodrich, "History of Center Compound," Part III, Section 3.

¹¹Bob Stark, "Intelligence Operations in Air Force Officer Prisoner-of-War Camps in Germany, 1939-1945" (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), Spivey Collection. Hereinafter cited as "Intelligence Operations."

The other methods used to send information home were less sophisticated, but no less important, than the coding effort. In the spring of 1943, the prisoners discovered that the Germans allowed casualty reports to go through with details uncensored. The prisoners immediately began including considerable information in them, all written in plain language. Another technique used to get information home was to split the backing paper away from a photograph, insert a piece of tissue paper on which data had been written, glue the picture back together again, and mail it through normal channels. The prisoners also transmitted information through individuals who were being repatriated. Detailed reports were prepared, and the party to be repatriated memorized the report word for word. Before the man left the camp, he was thoroughly tested by the intelligence staff to ensure that he had all the facts straight. And finally, on rare occasions, opportunities arose for getting information home through people who visited the camp.¹²

The effectiveness of the prisoners' intelligence system can be judged by two incidents that clearly demonstrate how the prisoners used it to hamper the German war effort. While the men were still at Barth, a young German corporal became friendly with an American and one day in casual conversation disclosed that he would shortly be one of four hundred NCOs to take a two-months' special officers' course at a camp in the village of Werel, near Frankfurt. Wings Day, the Senior British Officer at the time, reported this information home in

¹²"A History of Stalag Luft III," Part I, 79-80; Stark, "Intelligence Operations," 7. More will be said later about messages carried out by visitors.

a brief message ending with the words, "Suggest blitz." Nearly a year later the same German showed up at Stalag Luft III and told his prisoner friend that the German officer-cade camp at Werel had been bombed by the RAF, that thirty cade officers had been killed, and that the camp had been reduced to ruins. His final comment on the subject was "I cannot understand why they should have bombed a little place like Werel."¹³ In the second instance, a German corporal deliberately gave details about a twenty-five mile long war factory that ran along the railway line near his home town of Oplin in return for a number of pills which the British camp doctor guaranteed would induce the symptoms of incipient ophthalmic goitre and ensure his rejection in a medical review for front line duty. He gave pertinent details on the factory's layout and pointed out its exact position on one of the prisoners' maps. This information also was sent home, and three months later the American Twelfth Bomber Group, operating from Italy, pulverized the Oplin factory network.¹⁴

In terms of the prisoners' morale, the most important intelligence operation in camp had to do with receiving BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) radio newscasts. The prisoners relied upon these broadcasts to balance the information given in the German news communiques. Radios were strictly forbidden in camp, and extreme caution had to be exercised in using them and in disseminating the contents of the news to the prisoner.

¹³Sydney Smith, Mission Escape (New York: David McKay Company, 1968), 113.

¹⁴Ibid., 113-14.

The first radio to be brought into Stalag Luft III was carried by the NCOs who were transferred from Barth to Center Compound in April 1942. The parts had apparently been obtained at Barth through bribery, as that is how new pieces were secured when elements of the existing radio were found and confiscated. The radio was put together and hidden in a piano accordion which could still be played. One evening in January 1943, while one of the prisoners was working on the radio, the German NCO in charge of the Abwehr Department walked into the barracks without any warning and covered the prisoner with his pistol. Another prisoner quickly pulled the electric light fuses, and in the darkness the prisoners hid most of the parts before the German could get a flashlight out of his pocket. The men were able to replace the parts that the Germans confiscated. Less than two weeks later, however, the Germans surrounded the same barracks at five o'clock in the morning and conducted a very thorough search. The entire radio, with the exception of the earphone and several parts, were found and confiscated. The prisoners later learned that the search had been carried out at the suggestion of the German who had originally supplied the radio parts in order to obtain leave as a reward. He later supplied new parts to replace those that had been found. The reconstructed radio was hidden in a wall panel and remained undetected throughout the remainder of the time the NCOs stayed in Center Compound. When they left for another camp in June 1943, they took the set with them.¹⁵

¹⁵"A History of Stalag Luft III," Part II, 55-56. The same source reveals that since the Germans had not discovered the earphone when they found the radio equipment, leave was offered to any German who succeeded in finding it. The same man who had previously betrayed

There is some doubt as to how the officers in East Compound obtained their first radio, one account saying that it was smuggled in by the prisoners when they were transferred from Barth, and another report stating that the British prisoners who came from Warburg brought the radio with them.¹⁶ Both accounts agree, however, that only one radio existed in East Compound in the first months after the compound was opened and that it was discovered and confiscated by the Germans in July 1942. The officers were unable to obtain another one until December 1942 when a contact man acquired a German "People's Set." Unfortunately, it was broken and had to be set aside pending the receipt of the needed parts. Before they could be obtained, the essential parts of another receiver were smuggled into the camp by the men who returned from Schubin in April 1943. The pieces were transported in individual luggage, a biscuit tin, and a medicine ball. They were assembled by the end of April 1943 and placed in a wall of Barracks 69. In December 1943 the receiver was rebuilt into the top of a desk. Another set had been made from spare parts by June 1943 and placed in a false side of a box in which a prisoner kept his

the prisoners suggested to them that the earphone should be left in a certain cupboard so that he could arrange for it to be found by the Abwehr. He brought the prisoners a new pair of earphones and they arranged the time for the "discovery" of the old earphone. The German's story to the Abwehr was that he had learned of the hiding place by overhearing a conversation. The earphone was duly found and the German got an additional fourteen days leave. This kind of jockeying between the prisoners and their contacts was apparently quite common.

¹⁶The prisoners from Warburg are given credit in "A History of Stalag Luft III," Part I, 72. The account of the radio being transferred from Barth is found in Albert P. Clark, "Radio and News Service (unpublished manuscript, 1945), 1-2, Clark Collection [Special Collections Room, USAF Academy Library, Colorado], hereinafter cited as "Radio and News."

clothes. Spare parts were continuously collected from contacts and some arrived in parcels from the United States and England.

When the prisoners were transferred from East to North Compound, Captain Pieber, the German Abwehr officer who had helped the prisoners at Barth and had accompanied them to Stalag Luft III, carried one of the radios for them in his bulging brief case.¹⁷ In June 1943 a contact secured a large radio from which the prisoners obtained enough parts to build a small set with pieces left over to donate to the Americans who were then being transferred to South Compound.

The prisoners in South Compound sought to add to the collection of parts they had obtained from North Compound, but the absence of critical pieces kept them from constructing a set of their own. Their needs were met from a different source, however, when on January 10, 1944, a specially built radio was received in a parcel sent by the United States government. Occupying a space no larger than that required for a carton of cigarettes, the radio had been smuggled past the censors in a large container. During the late spring and summer of 1944 prisoners in South Compound obtained other radios from various sources and either gave them to other compounds in Stalag Luft III or kept them hidden as reserves.¹⁸

¹⁷Smith, Mission Escape, 112. According to this same source, Pieber also carried in his brief case that day two pamphlets giving the take-off, landing, and general flying instructions of the Messerschmitt 109 fighter and the twin-engined Dornier DOX, which the prisoners studied in the event one of them might someday be in a position to steal one of these aircraft and fly home.

¹⁸Interview with Albert P. Clark, March 8, 1976; Clark, "Radio and News," 2.

The officers in Center Compound obtained their first radio by stealing it from the infirmary situated in the Vorlager. One of the American pre-med students who was allowed to accompany patients to and from the infirmary spotted the radio, smuggled it under his large coat, and managed to get it into the compound where several men quickly disassembled it and hid the parts. A few days later, it was reassembled in the shape of a long tube and placed in a hollowed-out leg of a large table. Four nails in the table top directly above the hollowed-out leg were connected to the lead-in wire and the earphones. Electricity was obtained from the drop cord light hanging directly over the table which was attached to two of the nails in the table top. Earphones were attached to the other two nails. The earphones were made from the parts of the loudspeaker plus the thin diaphragm of tin taken from the hermetically-sealed tins of English cigarettes.¹⁹

Perhaps even more difficult than obtaining the radios was the continuing task of keeping them securely hidden from the Germans and disseminating the news without being detected. Again, only a few men in each compound actually listened to the broadcasts or even knew where the radios were located. At night, after prisoners had been posted around the barracks in positions that allowed them to observe the approach of any Germans, the intelligence personnel responsible for radio operations listened to the newscast and wrote out brief summaries of the news. Although the prisoners varied their methods of disseminating the news in order to avoid detection, the

¹⁹"A History of Stalag Luft III," Part I, 103; Spivey, "History." No information was found on radios used in West and Belaria Compounds.

usual practice was for one man in each barracks to obtain a copy of the news summary the morning after it was recorded, read it to the assembled members of his barracks, and then destroy the paper on which it was written. As with all such secreted materials, the summaries were usually written on tissue paper so that they could be eaten easily in the event discovery appeared imminent.

The radios assumed especial importance in the spring of 1944 when the prisoners worked out a system whereby the radios could be used significantly to speed up the communications process between the prisoners and their home governments. The prisoners realized that the coded letters offered little opportunity for rapid communications since months often elapsed between the time a message or inquiry was sent to the authorities at home and the time an answer was received in Sagan. They rightly concluded that if a special radio code could be devised, answers to code letters could be received in camp the same day that a reply was formulated in England. Two intelligence workers in East Compound devised a suitable code for radio transmission. Based on the letter code, it was far more elaborate and contained provisions for frequent changes since the Germans obviously would try to break it. Details of this wireless code were then sent home in duplicate, a process which involved about twenty different letters. In addition, the prisoners took advantage of an unusual opportunity which presented itself when a Swedish minister of religion known personally to an officer on the intelligence staff visited the camp and agreed to take a letter to the man's wife and post it from Sweden. As there was no limit on space, the entire wireless code was given in this long letter which was devoted to advice for the man's wife

concerning family investments.²⁰

Seven weeks later the prisoners received word that the intelligence authorities in England had accepted the wireless code. Thereafter, replies were normally received in the camp within twenty-four hours after they had been framed in England. This procedure was also used in the American compounds. One report indicates that on July 4, 1944, the home governments began sending special instructions to the prisoners over the radio, and that from that date onward instructions and information of an official nature were received regularly. The report also notes that the work associated with the receipt of the messages entailed considerable inconvenience, loss of sleep, and nervous strain for the individuals involved. Consequently, in South Compound at least, two teams were organized and employed alternately—four days on and four days off.²¹

The prisoners also devised covert ways of communicating between compounds. Two methods that were used in the compounds that were adjacent to one another were to place a message in a weighted object, or "bird," such as a tin can or hollowed-out rock and throw it over the fence, or to spell out messages in semaphore. The idea of throwing messages over the fence was not popular at first. It was difficult to coordinate the effort since the object had to be thrown at a moment when it would not be seen by the guards or Germans working in either compound. In addition there was the problem of finding qualified

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The men who knew about the contents of the letter were amused sometime later when a coded message was received asking on behalf of the officer's wife whether or not she was to follow this advice on investments. Stark, "Intelligence Operations," 7.

²¹Clark, "Radio and News," 2.

"hurlers." Through trial and error, however, the prisoners perfected this method and in time messages flew back and forth over an average distance of sixty yards with surprising frequency. The semaphore method called for a person standing inside a room which was visible from another compound to send Morse code with a small paddle. A dip to one side was a dot, to the other was a dash. It was a simple and effective practice but time consuming, and could be utilized only when the stations in the two compounds were close together. The simplest method of communicating was to have a person who could move from one compound to another carry messages. Father Coates, the British Catholic chaplain who worked in Center Compound, often brought verbal messages back to Center after his visits to other compounds. Much information also was exchanged when workers or leaders from the various compounds got together to conduct such official business as allocating Red Cross parcels, Y.M.C.A. equipment, or canteen supplies. After the mass escape in March 1944 the Germans did everything in their power to keep the prisoners in the different compounds apart. Even then the men were able to get important messages back and forth. Perhaps the most sophisticated approach involved the accountants who managed the prisoners' communal fund. The accountants, along with the German accounting staff, met once each month in the Kommandantur to audit the records. At these meetings the prisoners naturally had many papers, among which were coded messages. During the meeting, papers would be strewn all over the table, and after the meeting was over the prisoner accountants would include each other's coded figures among their own papers. Once each man was back in his own compound, he would

decode the messages at leisure.²²

The prisoners placed tremendous emphasis upon their ability to establish and maintain secret inter-compound communications. For routine business, as well as undercover activity, proper communication between compounds was essential. In the normal course of events, weeks might pass before a routine financial matter could be handled through official channels, and such channels could not be used at all for covert work. Finally, the Germans were only too eager to play one compound off against another, and it was only by means of secret communications that the prisoners were able to achieve a high standard of coordination and maintain a unified front against the common enemy.

Yet another area of intelligence involved photographic work. The prisoners needed cameras to take mug shots for the forged passports carried by escapers, to document certain aspects of camp life and conditions in camp which they felt violated the provisions of the Geneva Convention, and to secure photographs of certain Germans who might be sought by the Allies after the war.

Prior to the summer of 1943 the prisoners possessed only "pin-hole" cameras, homemade devices without true lenses. During the summer of 1943, however, contact men in North Compound obtained excellent German photographic equipment through bribery. At first the photographs were developed outside the camp by commercial black market studios, with German camp personnel transporting the film in and out of the compound. In early 1944 South Compound obtained three

²²Stark, "Intelligence Operations," 5; Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part V; Albert P. Clark, "Signals," (unpublished manuscript, 1945), 1-2, Clark Collection.

cameras along with quantities of film and developing equipment. Passport photographs were given first priority, and as many as thirty-two mug shots were taken during the course of one afternoon. Each man posed in front of a canvas backdrop with artificial lighting. The subject was dressed in civilian clothes and displayed a European haircut. Since the standard size for German passport photographs was larger than those made by the thirty-five millimeter cameras in the prisoners' possession, they built enlargers out of the extra camera lenses. All necessary darkroom equipment over and above that which was obtained through bribery or in parcels from home was constructed inside the camp. The photographs of selected Germans were taken by luring the person in question to prearranged spots from which his picture could be taken through knotholes or attic windows in the barracks. In some cases photographs were taken from roofs or buildings without any protection other than diversions.²³

A final responsibility assigned to the intelligence staff centered around emergency planning. From the winter of 1943-1944 onward the prisoners learned more and more about the atrocities occurring in Germany. They saw its effects upon those prisoners entering the camp who had been beaten by the Germans, obtained eye witness accounts from prisoners who had been mistakenly sent to concentration camps before being redirected to Stalag Luft III, and personally encountered the terror inflicted by the SS and Gestapo in the cold-blooded murder of fifty of the men who had participated in the great escape. They logically reasoned that their plight might

²³Albert P. Clark, "Photographic Work" (unpublished manuscript, 1945), 1-2, Clark Collection.

well get worse before it got better and felt they should establish contingency plans for almost any eventuality.²⁴

The prisoners concluded that there were several contingencies for which they should be prepared: a possible withdrawal by the Germans which would leave the prisoners on their own; an attempt by the Germans to move the prisoners into cities to discourage Allied bombing or into a Redoubt area after which the Germans would bargain for peace terms with the prisoners as hostages; a move westward before the advancing Russian army; a rescue attempt by Allied forces or envelopment by the advancing Russian army; and finally, an attempt by the Germans to liquidate the prisoners en masse. In anticipation of these possibilities, the prisoners devised several contingency plans. The plans varied somewhat in each compound, but generally fell into the following patterns.

In the event the Germans decided to move the prisoners westward, the men were determined that every effort should be made to escape in large numbers. In South Compound, for example, the escape committee was charged with the responsibility of providing twenty-five per cent of the people in the compound with articles of civilian clothing, maps, papers, money, and the necessary information to make an escape attempt if the opportunity should arise. If, on the other hand, the Germans

²⁴ For a sample of the type of information the prisoners obtained about atrocities then occurring in German concentration camps, see E. R. McGright "Urkunden Stalag 3 fur die altesten offiziere (Record for the senior officer), giving names and addresses of dead flying comrades," Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. This report, written in pencil in South Compound, relates the eye witness accounts of several fliers who were mistakenly sent to Buchenwalde, where they saw many of the horrors associated with that camp. The prisoners collected such information in anticipation of a postwar crimes report, and in the process of doing so kept themselves well informed on the state of affairs in Germany.

should suddenly pull out of the area, the prisoners were prepared to shift for themselves until rescued by the Russians. This entailed more dangers than one might suspect. If the situation became bad enough to warrant such a move on the part of the Germans, the prisoners realized the possibility existed of the country being thrown into revolution and chaos. Under such circumstances, all utilities for the camp would likely be shut off and the camp itself be subjected to raiding parties. Hence the prisoners laid plans for their own defense and established procedures to get along with minimal resources as well as to notify the Russians of the location of the camp and the identity of the occupants.

The contingency plan that most worried the prisoners dealt with the possibility of a German attempt to liquidate the prisoners en masse. The plans they devised to meet this threat called for extreme measures that would have been inappropriate in any other situation. In essence, their plans called for suicide squads who would attempt to overpower the attacking forces. While this was being done, the remainder of the prisoners were scheduled to concentrate all their energies on guard towers and the fence along only one side of the compound. Insofar as existing conditions would allow the prisoners were to rush these positions according to a prearranged plan. In certain cases which will be pointed out shortly, tunnels that were virtually completed were left unopened with a view toward using them at the last minute, if necessary, to get specially trained teams of prisoners outside the wire where they could neutralize some of the attackers and perhaps secure arms for the prisoners still inside. Whatever the relative merits or shortcomings of such plans, they clearly

indicate that the prisoners were greatly concerned about their physical safety and that they were once again utilizing their communal and military structures to the best possible advantage.²⁵

All the intelligence operations carried on by the prisoners required strict security measures. In safeguarding intelligence activities, as well as escape work, the prisoners found that they could easily be their own worst enemy. New prisoners especially tended to be overly curious about certain activities in camp, and it took only a few of them gathered in one place to arouse the suspicions of the Germans. Hence, the first step was to instruct new prisoners to ignore much of what they saw going on about them, or at least to pretend to ignore it. Second, elaborate procedures were established to ensure that sentries, normally called "stooges," were strategically placed so that the whereabouts of every German inside a compound could be known at all times. In addition, normal security measures were observed, such as limiting the number of people who knew about certain projects, concealing the identity of the people who worked on the different staffs, prohibiting loose talk, and keeping written records to a minimum or writing them on cigarette paper so they could be chewed up and swallowed with relative ease if necessary.

The stooging system was thorough and effective. Figure 13 shows how the prisoners positioned themselves in order to provide overlapping views of all avenues of access to a point where covert activities were underway. If by some chance a German should get close to

²⁵For more details on the prisoners' contingency plans, see Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part III, Section 6, and Spivey, "History," 162.

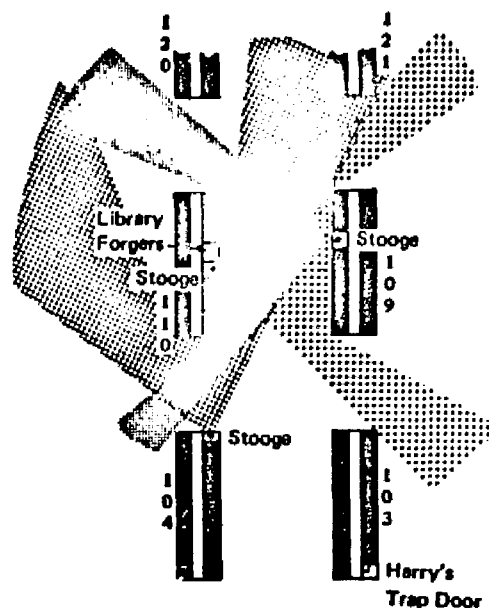


Figure 13

the workers before the alarm could be given, additional prisoners were posted nearby to intercept the intruder. If the situation was not critical, the interception might take the form of a "spontaneous conversation" wherein the prisoner would ask the German a question or otherwise divert his attention. If the German approached the area with a sense of determination that indicated he knew what he was looking for, the prisoners took drastic measures, such as engaging in a brawl in such a manner that one of them would be flung against the unwanted visitor. This disruptive exercise would be followed by extended apologies, all of which consumed sufficient time to allow the forbidden work to be hidden and for everyone involved to assume an air of innocence. The need for such elaborate precautions can readily be appreciated in view of what has already been said about the prisoners' multifarious intelligence activities. The importance of

security measures becomes even more obvious when one adds to these intelligence operations the numerous escape efforts undertaken by the prisoners and the large amount of covert work that was carried on in support of the escape program.

CHAPTER XII

ESCAPE ACTIVITIES

Introduction

Paul Brickhill's book, The Great Escape,¹ and the movie of the same name based on Brickhill's book have made the name Stalag Luft III synonymous with escape. Although this image unfortunately detracts from the numerous other achievements of the prisoners, it is essentially accurate and fitting. No other camp activity came close to escape work in exhibiting the prisoners' ingenuity, dedication, and sense of community spirit and purpose.

Under the leadership of Wings Day, the British Senior Officer first at Dulag Luft and later at Barth, escape activities grew from a fragmented effort by individuals and small groups in 1939 and 1940 to a highly organized aspect of camp life in 1941. By the time the prisoners were transferred from Barth to Stalag Luft III in April 1942, they had adopted escape as an "operational mission," had formed an escape committee or "X Organization," and had gained practical experience in numerous and diverse escape activities. Jimmy Buckley (the man appointed by Wings to head the X Organization), Squadron

¹Paul Brickhill, The Great Escape, with an Introduction by George Harsh, A Fawcett Crest Book (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1950).

Leader Roger Bushell, Flying Officer John Gilles, Flight Lieutenant Harvey Vivian, and an American serving in the British army, Major Johnnie Dodge, and three men selected from each barracks comprised the original committee. Under their experienced leadership, escape work became a highly coordinated and sophisticated art which absorbed the energies and talents of a considerable percentage of the prisoner population. Roger Bushell escaped before the prisoners arrived at Stalag Luft III, but the X Organization otherwise remained intact and immediately went into operation at Sagan, the prisoners' "new battlefield."

Rethinking the Question

In time the escape program at Stalag Luft III took on an even more serious complexion than it had possessed at Barth. The change at first was inspired largely by Wings Day who again, as the Senior British Officer in camp, found himself in the position of having to formulate policy in light of the continually changing environment in which the prisoners found themselves. As the years went by and the Germans continued to ride the tide of victory, Wings concluded in the spring and summer of 1942 that too many of the prisoners (and he apparently included himself in this group) still thought of escape in terms that were inadequate for the situation confronting them.

According to his biographer, for Wings,

the time had come to change into higher gear, to interpret the motives for the existence of his escape, intelligence and security organization in terms of war effort rather than as a sort of fairly safe game with the International Red Cross as referee. Prisoners of war, just because they had brushed with death and fallen

into enemy hands, should not be thought of as semi-neutrals.²

Earlier he had thought of escape as an avenue for maintaining the prisoners' pride, for through escape activities the prisoners felt they were still waging war against the Germans. Now escape was to be pursued primarily to hinder the German war effort with less concern for the impact of escape work upon the prisoners' morale. At Barth Wings had felt uncomfortable about letting a man take suicidal risks while attempting escape because he had not yet convinced himself that the probable results were worth the added danger. He altered his thinking on this issue while at Sagan. On distant battle fronts operations were not calculated on the basis of discomfort or loss of life but solely on their contribution to winning the war. Combatants were seldom justified in curtailing their efforts merely because the probable results appeared microscopic, and he felt the same philosophy should dictate the actions of prisoners of war. Besides, it was a well-known fact that escapes sometimes had a considerable effect upon the enemy. Every escaped prisoner caused the Germans to mobilize hundreds of Germans, and a mass escape of five or more people meant that thousands of police, troops, and civilian volunteers had to turn their attention toward the recapture of the escaped men. Escape alarms created panic at all echelons of the enemy's command structure and upset the local populace. In short, virtually every escape made the enemy divert attention to the home front which he would rather

²Sydney Smith, Mission Escape (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1968), 81. Hereinafter cited as Escape.

devote to the war zone.³

Wings knew he possessed the resources to transform this idea into reality. To compensate for the loss of Roger Bushell, who remained at large for some months, Wings had acquired new talent in the form of a group of prisoners who came into the camp from Warburg, a joint Army-RAF camp located in Silesia. While at Warburg, these men had picked up something of the patrol spirit that existed among their Army officer comrades. They were all hardened and experienced prisoners and they brought with them a mass of new ideas and techniques, including the art of extremely skillful forgery and some handy tips on transforming RAF uniforms and battle dress into whatever might be needed, civilian or military. Jimmy Buckley incorporated these men into his X Organization, and full-scale escape work commenced.⁴

Accumulating More Experience

In the coming weeks and months, the prisoners in East Compound made a variety of escape attempts, which included using disguises for walking out through the gates, sneaking off while on sick call parades, filing through the bars on the cooler, cutting through the wire fence, and tunneling. The most feverish activity centered on tunneling. During the spring and summer of 1942, the prisoners started between sixty and seventy tunnels. Most of them were very shallow and were discovered before completion, but some were better

³Smith, Mission Escape, 81-82.

⁴Ibid., 82.

concealed and a few men got out of the camp, though during this period virtually all the escapers were recaptured.

The Germans and the prisoners now engaged in their duel in earnest. When the Germans attempted to stop the tunneling by digging a seven-foot trench around the compound, the prisoners crawled into the trench and began to tunnel from there. The Germans filled in the trench and planted microphones in the ground around the fence to detect tunneling activities; the prisoners set about digging deeper tunnels beyond the range of the listening devices. When the Germans succeeded in discovering and destroying the tunnels with regularity, the prisoners adopted an idea brought over from Warburg which involved the digging of two interconnected tunnels. First, two trap doors were cut in the floors of two huts, and from these points of entry two shallow "camouflage" tunnels were dug, each going down about four feet into the ground and then being turned horizontally and extended toward the fence about thirty feet. Halfway along the horizontal portion of each of these tunnels, the prisoners made a second trap door in the floor and under this dug down another twenty feet before again turning horizontally toward the fence. The Germans seldom crawled through a tunnel when they found it, usually being satisfied merely to cave it in with water. The prisoners, therefore, concluded that if the Germans discovered and destroyed the shallow tunnels, the deeper ones could be tapped from a different direction and continued without much delay. One of the entire tunnel complexes, along with its second trap, was uncovered and destroyed; but the second one, which originated in Barracks 67, went forward. When the sand began to build up under that hut, the prisoners dug a short tunnel back to the adjoining hut and

started putting sand there. The main tunnel itself was then channeled under the kitchen in search of an additional area to disperse sand. To their dismay, the men found no space under the enclosed kitchen hut.

The Germans struck again, found the shallow dummy tunnel, and caved it in. As the prisoners had anticipated, the main tunnel escaped detection, so they dug a new dummy tunnel from another room in the same parent hut and sank another secret shaft to link once again with the main tunnel. Unfortunately, all the burrowing had undermined the barrack's foundations, and the weight from above collapsed the new dummy tunnel, bringing down a ten-foot stretch of sand on one of the tunnelers. He miraculously had his face just over the trap door to the secret shaft and could breathe. Without evidencing concern for their own safety, the other tunnelers dug frantically for an hour and pulled him out. Another shallow dummy tunnel had to be dug, along with another deep shaft before contact could again be made with the main tunnel.

The months passed and the engineering feat progressed well, attaining a length of approximately three hundred feet by fall. When only about one hundred feet remained to be dug, the Germans launched an intensive search of the building from which the tunnel emanated. Underneath they found fresh sand over the exit of the dispersal tunnel, dug down to the trap door, and traced the hole all the way back to the deep shaft. They then destroyed the entire complex of burrows.⁵

⁵"A History of Stalag Luft III," Part I, 37-38; Brickhill, The Great Escape, 24-27; Smith, Mission Escape, 88.

To no one's surprise a major purge out of the camp followed the discovery of the tunnel in October 1942. About one hundred men, mostly from the escaping fraternity, were sent to Oflag XXI B at Schubin within that same month. Although not originally included in the group, Wings asked permission to go along and his request was granted. Many of his closest friends and associates were going, and he wanted to be with them. Besides, a higher ranking officer, Group Captain Martin Massey, had arrived and the camp would be in good hands with him at the helm. And Roger Bushell, who had been returned to Sagan after evading capture for six months, could handle anything undertaken by the remaining members of the escape organization.

The night before they left, Wings and Buckley had a long talk with Bushell and recommended that he shut down all escape activities for a time. Bushell had been rescued from the hands of the Gestapo only through the intercession of prominent persons, including von Massow, the German in charge of the Censoring Office whose brother was an important general, and though he was now back in prison, everyone knew he was a marked man and that certain death awaited him if caught outside the camp again.⁶

The tempo of escape activity in East Compound did not pick up again for several months after the October 1942 "bust." Tunneling activity usually slowed down in the winter months anyway, and the ranks of the original escape organization had been badly depleted by the Schubin purge. As the Germans soon came to realize, however, transfer of the prisoners solved nothing; it merely moved the

⁶Smith, Mission Escape, 89-91.

battlefield to another location. Before winter set in at Schubin, an attempt to scale the wire while the perimeter lights were momentarily fused out had been tried and, with Buckley again at the helm, six tunnels had been started.

One of the tunnels at Schubin proved to be an unqualified success. On March 3, 1943 forty men crawled out the opening beyond the wire and scattered themselves throughout the Reich. Within two weeks everyone but Buckley and his traveling companion had been recaptured. These two men reached the Danish coast and set out in a small boat to cross the remaining three miles to Sweden. No one knows for sure what happened, but a heavy fog settled in during the night and it is suspected they were accidentally run down by a ship. His companion's body washed ashore some time later, but no trace of Buckley was ever found. An invaluable member of the escape organization had disappeared from the scene forever, but not without exacting a price from the Germans. The escape diverted more than four thousand German troops to the area and for a period of a week or more absorbed the full attention of at least one thousand policemen and home guardsmen.⁷ Another purge followed. It did not come for almost two months, but when it came several hundred men were involved, and they were all sent back to Sagan where the battle was joined once again.

The "Golden Era"

When the Schubin men arrived back at Stalag Luft III in May 1943, they discovered many changes and anything but the quietude that

⁷Ibid., 95-97, 103-09; Brickhill, The Great Escape, 27.

had prevailed when they had left the previous October. During the intervening months the new North Compound had been built. The prisoners that had remained in East Compound over the winter became aware of the construction work on North Compound in early 1943 and learned that they would be transferred there when it opened. Bushell had taken Wings' and Buckley's advice and kept escape activities to an absolute minimum throughout the final months of 1942 and into the early months of 1943. The lack of activity had lulled the Germans into a false sense of security, and by the turn of the year they had concluded that the prisoners had resigned themselves to captivity. Consequently, when the Germans announced the pending move to North Compound, they did not suspect an ulterior motive on the part of the prisoners who volunteered to help in the camp's construction on the pretext that they merely wanted to keep themselves constructively occupied.

The Germans gave the prisoners permission to work in the new camp, and Bushell set the escape committee to work. Before his return in October 1942, while he was still making his way through Germany and hiding out with Czech partisans, Bushell saw and experienced things which created within him an intense hatred for the Nazis and everything they stood for. He thus had arrived independently at the same conclusions as Wings about escape and had committed himself totally to the idea of turning Stalag Luft III into a hornet's nest for the Germans. Bushell thought primarily in terms of causing maximum harm to the Reich by arranging mass escapes on a scale never before imagined by the Luftwaffe, and set about the task of getting two hundred or more men beyond the wire at one time.

The escape committee met and began to lay their plans.

Bushell's requisitions for escape materials astounded the committee-men: shoring boards for three tunnels, each descending down thirty feet and extending out towards the woods three hundred feet or more; underground railways and workshops; two hundred forged passes; two hundred outfits of civilian clothing; two hundred compasses; and one thousand maps. When the chief forger, Tim Waleen, heard the request for two hundred passes, all properly dated, his only reply was "Jesus!" Bushell reportedly answered in turn, "Maybe he'll help you."⁸

The volunteer workers kept themselves very busy. They surveyed and stepped off the new camp with great precision. The men also gathered and hid materials which the workmen left lying around the compound, such as nails, cement, electrical wiring, pieces of lumber and metal, and anything else which they thought might prove useful later on. Because of the relative ease with which these items were secured and the numerous prospects for escape the prisoners now envisioned before them, the opening of North Compound became known to many as "the Golden Era." On April Fools Day the prisoners scheduled to be moved from East Compound to North transferred their belongings, among which were detailed plans for three large tunnels. Tom, Dick,

⁸Brickhill, The Great Escape, 31. Brickhill's account of these efforts and their culmination in the mass escape on the night of March 24-25, 1944 provides detailed coverage on all aspects of the episode and has been heavily relied upon in this work. The information provided here mentions little that has not already received widespread public attention, but included anyway because of the importance of the events in the overall history of Stalag Luft III.

and Harry, as the tunnels were named, originated from Barracks 123, 122, and 104, respectively (see Figure 14).

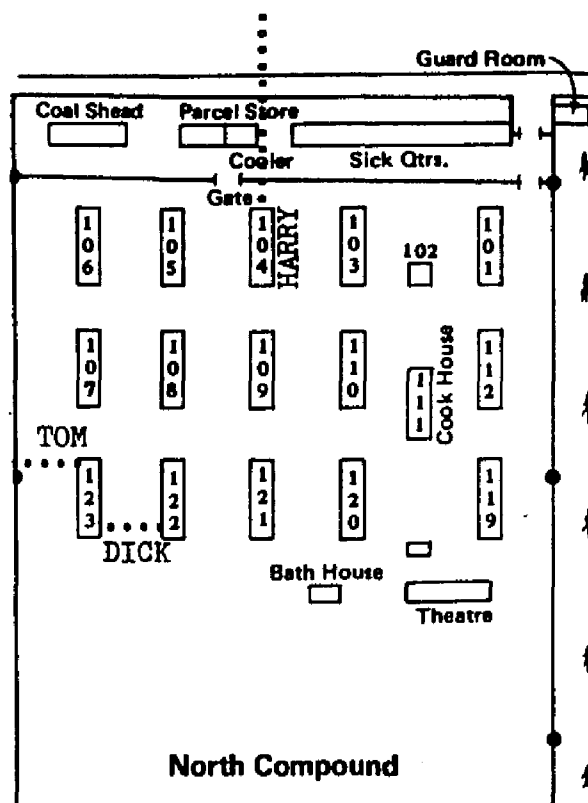


Figure 14

All three tunnels were well underway when the men from Schubin arrived.

Relations between the Americans and British had always been remarkably good. And although the Americans comprised a minority in the North Compound, they were fully integrated into the camp's administrative and escape machinery. Until Colonel Charles Goodrich entered their ranks a short time ahead of the purge from Schubin, Lieutenant Colonel Clark had remained the Senior American Officer. He and other Americans had distinguished themselves in every camp activity. Americans worked in each of the "factories" that

manufactured escape materials. Jerry Sage proved to be a genius at the seemingly impossible task of "destroying" sand from the underground tunnels. Clark had established a remarkable security system to ensure the secrecy of all clandestine activities.

Junior Clark, as he was affectionately called, served as "Big S" in the escape organization in North Compound and as such was in charge of all security measures in the camp. He divided the compound into two sections; the "S" or safety zone was the east portion of the camp where the gate was situated, the remaining area was in the "D" or danger zone. As soon as a German penetrated into "D" he was followed, and if he got within fifty feet of an exposed tunnel or factory, warnings were issued and the work put away until the intruder moved out of the area.

Protecting all the work in the numerous factories was a major undertaking, but so was the labor that went on in those factories. The methods used in the production of escape materials were developed largely by the prisoners in East and North Compounds, and consequently the descriptions of these methods given here also will suffice to explain how the same tasks were accomplished in the other compounds.

Clothing used in escapes was obtained from several sources, including the Red Cross clothing store in the Vorlager, the Abwehr store of confiscated clothing, parcels from prisoners' next-of-kin, successful "trading" by contact men, and through clandestine shipments from the American and British intelligence services. Cloth materials of all kinds were used, such as blankets, sheets, quilts, towels, kitbags, and woolen comforters. The prisoners who worked in

the clothing store were especially helpful since they were sometimes able to appropriate considerable quantities of clothing and other materials. In East Compound, for instance, the German officer in charge of the store removed all the civilian buttons on the great-coats. He absentmindedly left them on a shelf, from which his prisoner assistant carefully removed them. The items sent by the home government were cleverly concealed. Blankets were sent with concealed markings which, when rubbed with a damp cloth, provided detailed patterns for men's suits. One RAF officer's uniform received in North Compound proved, on close inspection, to be a cleverly disguised Luftwaffe uniform.

Dyes were indispensable and were needed in considerable quantities. Pormanganate of potash and gentian violet were stolen from Sick Quarters. Chloride of lime left by the Germans in the wash houses for cleaning purposes was used for bleaching. Tea and coffee were used especially for dying khaki trousers. Coloring was also obtained by boiling colored bindings of books. Contact men secured some dye, and in late 1943 British and American sources began supplying dye that could be used with cold water. This was particularly useful since all the other dyes needed boiling water, which had to be fetched from the kitchen in jugs, ostensibly for making brew, and boiled up again on room stoves. All dyeing took place in the huts at night, and every article had to be dried in time to be hidden by morning. East and North Compounds together produced the following types and quantities of escape clothing.

46 overalls: the type worn by the ferrets were made from sheets dyed dark blue; those worn by German and foreign workmen were made from white unstriped pyjamas dyed dark blue

42 German uniforms, with caps, belts, buckles, and insignia: the caps were made from the prisoners' field service caps, the roundel and badge being embroidered on; the buckles, buttons and badges were made mostly by pouring molten silver paper from cigarette packages or lead taken from the beads of tin cans into plaster casts made out of soap or plaster of Paris taken from Sick Quarters. Contacts secured the loan of buckles, buttons, and badges long enough for craftsmen to make impressions for the casts. Belts were made of black paper from barrack walls, by altering existing belts or from leather boots

260 civilian jackets: made from uniform tunics dyed after removal of pockets and belts and the rounding off of corners

230 pairs of civilian trousers: made from uniform trousers and blankets

140 overcoats: made from officers' greatcoats with shoulder straps removed and with civilian buttons substituted for the originals

100 civilian suits: made mostly from uniforms by altering the lapels, substituting buttons, and modifying pockets

300 civilian caps: made from blankets; skiing caps were made from altered officers' hats with cardboard-stiffened peaks

90 ties: consisting of uniform ties with patterns worked in colored threads

60 haversacks: made from kitbags and from the mackintosh covers in which game boards were sometimes sent

Shirts and waistcoats were modified with pockets to carry a ten day supply of food concentrates⁹

Forged papers were as important to the escaper as specially designed clothing. The materials needed for the arduous task of

⁹"A History of Stalag Luft III," Part I, 21-24 and Part III, 14-15.

forging papers included pens, brushes, inks, paper, tracing paper, and copies of the original documents, all of which were procured from a variety of sources. Contact men provided all these items in limited quantities. The prisoners used toilet paper and the fly leaves of books and Bibles for tracing paper. Linoleum and rubber from boots were used to make stamps. Pens, inks, and paper were obtained from the education office and in parcels from home. A few Germans provided the original documents for copying and often warned the prisoners, through the contact men, when the passes were changed. Some documents were also received from home governments, but these were usually outdated before they arrived. Among the documents that the prisoners produced were:

Dienstausweise—a brown card entitling the holder to be on Wehrmacht property

Urlaubscheine—a yellow form used as a leave chit for foreign workers

Ruckkehrscheine—a pink form for foreign workers being sent back to their own country

Konnkarte—a light gray form which served as an identity card

Carte Indentita—French identity card issued in France and bearing a 50 Centime stamp

Sichtvermark—a passport visa

Ausweise and Vorlaufiger Ausweise—passes and temporary passes

Polizeitliche Bescheinigung—a police permit authorizing the presence of foreign workers in given areas

Letters from firms for which the holder was supposedly working, with the firm's heading on the note paper

Some of these documents were covered with lines of close print,

and others had a background of fine whirled lines. Some took one man a month to produce, working five hours a day. Mistakes were sometimes covered by burning a cigarette hold over them. Almost all of the work was done by hand. A few items were typed, however, and at least one German cooperated by taking items home and having his wife type them for the prisoners.¹⁰

A special type of food was also made for the escapers. A food concentrate was used which could be stored indefinitely. It consisted of Red Cross food with a high nutritional value, such as milk powder, Morlicks powder or tablets, vitamin pills, oatmeal, crushed biscuit, Ovaltine, raisins, glucose, and chocolate. These items were boiled together until they formed a fudge-like substance. During 1942 the prisoners also developed two white powders which reportedly quenched thirst.¹¹

Maps were drawn in various scales to cover every probable escape route from Germany. The originals were secured from contacts or were borrowed from the newsrooms. Copies were either hand drawn or reproduced by means of a jelly substance made from jelly crystals from Red Cross food parcels and ink from indelible pencil leads that had been boiled down. Toilet paper was used for tracing paper. Several prisoners in East Compound worked every day for one month to produce a large scale, detailed map that was used for briefing escapers.¹²

¹⁰Ibid., Part III, 17-18.

¹¹Ibid., Part I, 26.

¹²Ibid., 27.

Compasses were acquired from prisoners who managed to retain them until they arrived in camp and from a manufacturing process that enabled the prisoners to turn out hundreds of compasses with relative ease. A circular piece about the size of a nickel was stamped out of heated victrola records, molded into the shape of a cup, and beveled around the top edge. Cardboard was then placed inside the cup to act as a cushion for the glass cover and to absorb moisture. A phonograph or sewing needle was mounted in the center of the cup to serve as the post upon which a magnetized strip of razor blade could rotate. Directional markings were inscribed on the cardboard with phosphorous paint.¹³

A variety of miscellaneous escape equipment also was constructed in the camp or obtained from diverse sources. Rifles were carved from hunks of wood. The stocks were stained with brown shoe polish. The "metal" parts were made by filling in the appropriate sections of wood with lead pencil markings and polishing them until they gleamed. Holsters were made out of stiff cardboard that also was stained with shoe polish. Tools left lying around by workmen when the Compound was opened were collected by the prisoners and hidden. Others were

¹³Thomas E. Mulligan, Lyman B. Burbank, and Robert R. Brunn, "History of Center Compound, Stalag Luft III, Sagan Germany" (unpublished manuscript, 1945), Part V [Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Maxwell AFB, Alabama]. Hereinafter cited as "History of Center Compound." Captain John Bennet, an American B-17 pilot shot down in September 1942 developed the technique of making compass cases out of old records and glass. He also adopted the practice of stamping on the bottom of the compasses the inscription "Made in Stalag Luft III." Interview with Albert P. Clark, April 15, 1976.

stolen from workers and electricians who entered the camp from time to time. Such things as bolts from wagon wheels became hammers and picks, while table knives became saws and chisels. Gramophone springs also were made into saws. Wire cutters were made out of parts taken from stoves. Wood for shoring up tunnels was obtained by removing parts of walls from obscure parts of buildings, by disassembling tables, benches, and other camp equipment, and by removing several of the eight or so boards that supported the mattresses in the beds.

Finally, a variety of "gadgets" were built to aid in the construction of tunnels. The air pumps used in tunnels were made out of two kitbags distended with wooden hoops. They had inlet and outlet valves that were worked in part by springs taken from chest expanders provided by the Y.M.C.A. for physical conditioning. The air-lines consisted of dried milk tins connected end to end. Digging tools were made out of tin cans and wood. Tunnel lamps were made out of tins filled with margarine which had been boiled and strained to get rid of the water. Wicks were made out of pajama cords.¹⁴

A variety of hiding places were found for all these materials. The tunneling equipment was usually stored in the tunnels being worked on, while other items were stowed away in "inactive" tunnels which were relatively safe since they were not entered regularly and were, therefore, unlikely to come to the attention of the Germans. Special cupboards were constructed in the walls by the carpentry shop. False bottoms and backs were built into closets and foot lockers. In

¹⁴These miscellaneous items are discussed in numerous sources, but see especially "A History of Stalag Luft III," Part I, 32-36.

addition, numerous items were buried in the gardens and elsewhere in the camp.

The factories that produced the goods were located throughout the camp. Tasks like forging documents and map making had to be done close to windows where there was good light. Noisy labor was often done down in the tunnels or near band or choir practices. Much activity was conducted in the classrooms, theaters, and church rooms where the prisoners could easily clandestine labor while appearing to be occupied with approved projects.

In addition to these factory and security-related tasks, which were accomplished by small groups of highly trained individuals, there were a number of escape-related chores that required the cooperation and labors of almost everyone in camp, such as executing "stooging" duties and disposing of tons of sand. Right under the eyes of the Germans hundreds of yards of bright whitish-yellow sand was dumped in the compound and worked into the topsoil without leaving any tell-tale signs for the observant ferrets to detect. This was done primarily by undertaking authorized digging projects, such as gardens, and then working small quantities of sand into the existing soil over a long period of time. The sand was usually carried out of the tunnel area in small elongated cloth bags concealed in the carrier's pant legs or under his coat. After arriving at the place where the sand was to be dumped, the carrier pulled a string attached to a pin that opened the bottom of the bag and while the sand gradually drained out the prisoner worked it into the existing soil with his feet or garden tools. Sand also was dispersed in this fashion on the sports fields where players then worked it into the ground during the normal course

of play.

Considering the extent of American participation in these wide ranging activities, the prisoners in North Compound had to make a difficult decision when they learned that the Americans were to be placed in a separate compound during the summer of 1943. None of the three tunnels then under construction was near completion. If work continued on all three tunnels, the Americans would be long gone before any of them could be finished. After weighing all the pros and cons, the escape committee decided to concentrate solely on Tom. The effort produced a tunnel that extended two hundred and sixty feet towards the woods. This placed the projected exit about one hundred and forty feet outside the fence. Only the upward shaft remained to be dug when the Germans discovered the tunnel and destroyed it. Unfamiliarity with such a lengthy work caused a German explosives engineer to overload the charge: the tunnel caved in, but so did the foundation and roof of Barracks 123.¹⁵

The Americans in North Compound moved into South Compound one week later. At approximately this same time, American prisoners were being placed in Center Compound, from which the NCOs had recently been transferred. Generally speaking, the Americans in Center and South Compounds succeeded in duplicating the British effort in terms of manufacturing escape equipment and devising sophisticated and complex escape schemes. The Americans, through no fault of their own, however, never achieved fame as escapers, primarily because they arrived in large numbers at a time when escape, for reasons which will

¹⁵Brickhill, The Great Escape, 100.

be explained shortly, was becoming increasingly difficult and extremely dangerous.

The Americans in Center Compound found upon their arrival in August 1943 that the few British officers that had been sent into the camp to help the Americans get established already had formed an escape committee and had undertaken numerous escape projects. The Americans were accepted into the organization, but disagreements frequently arose. In this instance, the British felt the Americans were too individualistic and, in regard to the early arrivals in Center Compound, they appear to have been right. The British, for example, shared the labors of digging tunnels without questioning the right of certain men to receive priority positions on the list of men who could escape through the tunnel when it broke. The Americans in Center were unwilling to accept such a system at first since they refused to admit that one person was any more qualified to escape than another.

In time the Americans in Center adopted most of the British attitudes toward escape and, while the British were present in the compound and after January 1944 when the British were transferred to Belaria Compound, the Americans made progress in their own escape efforts. Colonel Spivey had been shown the three tunnels underway in North Compound during his short visit there in August before he became the SAO in Center. Rather than attempt anything so ambitious, however, the Escape Committee in Center decided to try a rush job and take the Germans by surprise since the latter would undoubtedly think that the new prisoners were still too disorganized to do much tunneling. Several long tunnels were constructed, one of which

reached a length of about one hundred feet before it ran into a cesspool and was abandoned. At least four other attempts were made with tunnels, and numerous ruses were tried to fool the Germans into letting prisoners out through the gate or over the fence. Between August 1943 and March 1944, however, only one man from Center succeeded in getting outside the wire, and he was a British flier who proceeded to imitate one of the well-known ferrets who had a habit of walking very slowly around the camp with his hands folded behind his back. The ferret had a distinct gait and posture which could not be mistaken by the prisoners or the guards. The escaper who imitated him practiced the German's distinctive manner for weeks. A ladder was constructed the night before the escape and stored in one of the attics of the barracks. At the appointed time, during lunch hour when most of the Germans were eating their noon meal, the escaper donned his specially made clothes, took the ladder and stalked slowly across the warning wire toward the fence. He yelled in German to one of the guards in the nearest tower and told him that he was going to climb over the fence in order to repair one of the strands of barbed wire. The guard let him proceed. The prisoner climbed the ladder to the top of the fence, lowered himself down the other side, climbed the other fence and casually walked into the woods. He encountered only one German on his way but, as luck would have it, the German was a man whom the prisoner had been trying to "tame" and who was therefore readily able to identify him. Within minutes after he crossed the fence the prisoner was led back through the gate and

placed into a solitary confinement cell.¹⁶

The prisoners in South Compound experienced even more difficulties than the men in Center Compound in the execution of their escape program. When Colonel Goodrich assumed command as the Senior American Officer in South Compound, he took with him from North Compound a number of Americans who had worked closely with the British. These men were optimistic about the possibilities for escape that lie before them since the opening of a new compound always seemed to present new opportunities. The Germans, however, had learned much between April, when North Compound opened, and September, when the prisoners marched into South. The earlier move to North had marked the beginning of the "Golden Era" of escape in Stalag Luft III. When the Germans had opened that compound in April, the prisoners found materials that could be used in escape work and hid them away with relative ease. Furthermore, the Germans had not taken careful note of the appearance of the facilities before the prisoners moved in, and thus found it difficult to determine when something had been altered. For a time trees were left standing in the northern half of the compound, which made close observation of escape activities all but impossible. All these oversights had been remedied before the prisoners moved into South Compound.

South Compound was neat and clean when it opened. The sand under the huts had been raked so as to make any disruption of the soil there easily visible, all the trees had been cleared out, and all

¹⁶Spivey, "History," 144-46, 151-52, 155-56; "A History of Stalag Luft III," Part IV, 3-7.

loose articles had been cleared away. As an extra security measure, the Germans put a shadow on Clark. Though Clark was never able to confirm his suspicions, he is convinced that Bushell is the man who was responsible, at least indirectly, for the extra precautions the Germans had taken. Clark's reasoning is that in an effort to draw the attention of the Germans away from the two remaining tunnels still under construction in North, Bushell secretly gave the Germans the impression that the British were happy to see the Americans go since they, and not the British, were the fanatic tunnelers who had achieved the wonders underground which had been exposed when tunnel Tom was discovered. The inference plainly was that the British would be causing the Germans no more trouble now that the bloody Americans were gone and that the Germans would do well to concentrate their attention on South rather than North Compound. The Germans apparently took the bait, for they sent their most diligent and successful anti-escape expert, Glimnitz, to South Compound where he continued to live up to his reputation as a keen opponent. Thus, although escape attempts were made in South Compound, the efforts proved unsuccessful, and the escape team there never achieved the fame it deserved. Many members in South Compound's X Organization had worked on tunnels in North which they were never given an opportunity to use because of the untimeliness of their move. These same men served as decoys in South Compound while work steadily progressed and met with success in North Compound. The members of the escape committee in South Compound were seemingly the unsung heroes of Stalag Luft III's escape organizations.

The last two compounds to be opened in Stalag Luft III, West

and Belaria Compounds, also enjoyed little success in terms of escape. Both of them were opened in the spring of 1944, and the prisoners who lived in them simply did not have time to initiate escape work on anything much more than an individual basis before the idea of mass organized escape became frowned upon as a result of the tragic aftermath of the mass escape from North Compound in March 1944.

Marks of Success

Even though the newer compounds were encountering little success in their escape work, the men in the older communities continued to achieve success. Several escape attempts in East and North Compounds that occurred between April 1943 and the end of March 1944 deserve special notice. The first occurred in East Compound in October 1943 through the use of a modern day version of the Trojan horse. A vaulting horse, constructed in the form of a large wooden box that was hollow on the inside and open on the bottom, was carried out to the same spot on the playing field every day, where it was set down and utilized by the prisoners who took turns jumping over it in the course of their daily exercise drills. Inside the box a tunneler built a trap door in the sand which could be replaced each day and covered with dirt. Under the trap door he dug a shallow tunnel. The sand was placed in twelve bags which hung on hooks in the horse. When these were full the trap was placed over the hole and the horse, with the sand and prisoner propped up inside, was carried back to the barracks where the sand was quickly dispersed. The work, which was begun in July, was necessarily slow, but by October 29 the tunnel was completed and used by three prisoners who escaped and made their way

back to England.¹⁷

The success of the Trojan horse gave the prisoners the idea that other tunnels might be made with similar traps elsewhere than under the barracks. In the winter of 1943-1944, a tunnel known as "Margaret" was started. The trap for this tunnel was sunk on the parade ground. During an Appell, two cubic feet of sand were dug away, the trap was put in and the sand was replaced. During each subsequent roll call the trap was raised while work progressed on the sinking of the vertical shaft. That this project could be carried on during the Appells is ample testimony to the British boast that they could indeed confuse the German count any time they wanted by causing untold turmoil among the ranks. The shaft went down four feet, and at the bottom the prisoners built a chamber large enough for two men to hide and work in throughout the day. They usually went down together during the morning Appell and stayed there until evening roll call. During this time the trap was in position and ventilation was provided by means of air holes punched up to the surface by the men inside. Prisoners stamped and shuffled their feet to make the replaced earth over the trap indistinguishable from the surrounding soil. In order to get the tunnelers up in time to be counted in the evening, the prisoners who formed the squadron covering the site of the trap went on parade early, accompanied by two or three other squadrons so that the consistent early arrival of one would not

¹⁷"A History of Stalag Luft III," Part I, 38. Two books written about this escape by two of the participants are Eric Williams, The Wooden Horse (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1949), and Oliver Philpot, Stolen Journey (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1952).

become obvious to the Germans. The tunnel was dug in the winter, thus allowing the prisoners to dispose of the sand by hiding bags of dirt under the greatcoats as they walked off the field. Shoring boards were carried out in the same way and handed down to the tunnelers when they got inside. When the weather became so bad that the Appell was taken inside, rugby games were organized and a scrum formed over the trap while the tunnelers got out. Tunnelers did not go down if the weather was bad in the morning, but when the weather deteriorated in the afternoon after the men were already in the tunnel, the rugby games had to be played since the prisoners would not have survived the night. Furthermore, rugby games sometimes were played in the worst weather simply to accustom the Germans to the idea so that they would not suspect anything when the games were needed for the tunnelers.

The tunnel was almost completed when the mass escape in North Compound occurred in March 1944. When the prisoners in East Compound learned that fifty of the escapers had been shot, they decided not to use Margaret. The tunnel was completed, however, and was set aside as one of the avenues of escape for the special defense teams that were organized as a part of the contingency plans discussed earlier.¹⁸

The prisoners in North Compound demonstrated ingenuity in ways other than constructing tunnels. In May 1943, for example, plans were laid for a mass escape by several parties of prisoners who were to go to the Vorlager of the East Compound for delousing. Two of

¹⁸"A History of Stalag Luft III," Part I, 40-41.

these parties, escorted by prisoners disguised as German guards, were to march towards the Vorlager, and then turn off into the woods bordering the road between the Vorlagers of the North and East Compounds. The second party was to occupy the attention of guards and sentries while the first party got into the woods. The escape took place on June 12, 1943. The first party, comprised of two German-speaking prisoners who acted as guards and twenty-five other prisoners, got through the gates and into the woods. The second party, made up of seven prisoners, among whom were Lieutenant Colonel Clark and Colonel Goodrich, got through the first gate but were stopped at the second gate by one of the German guards who did not recognize the "guard" leading the party. All the men in the second party were arrested, as were all the men in the first party, but not before one of them had traveled to within several hundred yards of the Swiss border and two others had made their way to a local airfield where they were apprehended while attempting to start an airplane.¹⁹

Numerous other escapes were attempted from North Compound, but the center of attention in that compound undoubtedly remained fixed on the three major tunnels, Tom, Dick, and Harry. Space does not permit a complete retelling of the story surrounding these tunnels, but a general idea of the magnitude and complexity of the tunnels as engineering feats can be obtained by surveying a few basic facts pertaining to their construction.

The openings for all three tunnels were cut out of concrete

¹⁹Ibid., Part III, 43-44.

since the barracks in North Compound were elevated several feet off the ground and only the concrete parts made contact with the ground. Tom originated in Barracks 123 and ran westward. Its trap was made in the concrete floor of a small annex to one of the rooms and was bounded on two sides by walls, and on the other side by a chimney. The trap itself was made from concrete left lying around by the Germans, and it was so well disguised that workers reporting for duty could not find it until it was pointed out to them. Dick originated in Barracks 122 and ran westward. The trap for Dick was built in the floor of the washroom inside a water drain. A grating which covered a concrete drain eighteen inches square and two feet deep was taken up so that the trap could be built by chipping out one side of the drain which was then replaced with a slab of concrete which could be slid up and down. When the trap was in place, the drain functioned just as it always had. Harry emerged from Barracks 104 and ran northward. Its trap was built under a stove which sat upon a tile-covered concrete foundation.

The shafts directly beneath the traps extended thirty feet straight down and were in themselves complex structures. They were shored up solid with boards from top to bottom. At the bottom of each one three separate chambers were built, one to house the air pump, another to provide space for storing sand from the tunnel until it could be dispersed, and a third to serve as a general workroom and storage area for tunneling equipment and escape aids.

The tunnels themselves were all constructed along similar lines. As soon as the tunnels were long enough, rails were attached to the flooring boards. Wooden trolley cars ran on the rails for the

purpose of transporting sand inside the tunnels. The cars were pulled by ropes made of plaited string. The air-line ran under the flooring boards and was extended as the tunnel progressed.

Dispersing or "destroying" the sand required enormous effort. The vertical shaft and three chambers produced twelve tons of sand from each of the three tunnels. One ton of sand was excavated for each three and a half feet of forward progress in the horizontal portions of the tunnels. Approximately eighteen thousand individual trips were made between the traps and the dispersal grounds by the "penguins," the men who carried and spread the dirt. The maximum amount of sand dispersed in one day's work from any one tunnel was sixty pounds per minute for a period of one hour. During the winter, when it was impossible to camouflage the sand in the snow or work it into the frozen ground, the sand was placed under the floor of the theater which, unlike the other buildings, was enclosed all the way down to the ground. The theater had been built by the prisoners, and the Germans presumed there was no space under the floor. The trap in the theater floor was built under one of the seats. Sixty-eight tons of sand were put under the theater and another twelve tons were put down Dick, which had been set aside in favor of Harry, after the former was already well along.

Staggering quantities of wood and other materials were used in the construction of the tunnels. Fifty bed boards were supplied daily for shoring; about two thousand bed boards were used for Harry alone. Boards from the double floors in the barracks were also used. Hardwood for trolleys, railway lines and ladders for the vertical shaft came from chairs, tables, benches, and stools. Thirty Klim cans

were needed daily for the air-lines. Tin from Klim cans was wrapped around the wheels of the trolleys also. Axles for the trolleys were made out of bars taken from barrack stoves. The Parcels Officer supplied three hundred feet of string each week, and this was plaited into rope for hauling the trolleys. Four hundred feet of manila rope brought into the compound by the Germans to make a boxing ring was stolen and used in the mass escape because the plaited rope was not strong enough to pull the men down the tunnel on the trolley. Eight hundred feet of single-strand, insulated, damp-proof electric wire was stolen from German workmen engaged in wiring a building in the compound. Electric lamps were supplied by contact men. The electricity for the tunnel lights was obtained by splicing into the wires running into the barracks. Screws and nails were stolen from workmen or removed from buildings in the compounds.²⁰

On the night of March 24-25, 1944, eighty prisoners managed to pass through the opening of tunnel Harry before the Germans discovered the hole outside the wire. This was far below the two hundred figure set by Bushell,²¹ but the men who did escape succeeded in creating the turmoil within the Reich which the prisoners desired. Of the eighty

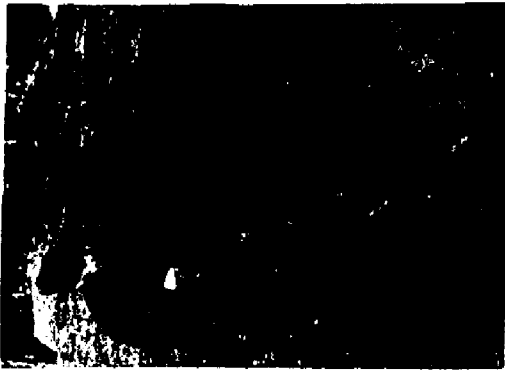
²⁰These details and a great many others pertaining to the tunnels and the escape are revealed in "A History of Stalag Luft III," Part III, 33-99.

²¹Two hundred men were in fact fully prepared to make the escape that night and were present in Barracks 104 awaiting their turn. Because of unexpected delays in getting the men through the tunnel, however, only eighty actually emerged through the opening. The remainder destroyed their forged papers and maps when they heard the shooting outside the wire. They also took off their escape clothing, but since it could not be readily destroyed it was found and confiscated by the Germans.

men who got out, four were captured at the mouth of the tunnel but seventy-six cleared the camp area. In response to the escape, the Germans issued a "Grossfahndung," the highest search order in the land. The expense to the Reich in manhours, embarrassment, and in terms of the danger of a possible coordinated sabotage effort caused Hitler to issue the famous "Sagan Order" that led to the death, by shooting, of fifty of the seventy-six escapers. Bushell was among the fifty. Wings was captured and later escaped again, but not before spending agonizing months in several concentration camps where he was continually plagued by uncertainty, starvation, and ill-treatment. Ironically, one of the things that saved his life was that by this time he had come to be regarded as one of the "prominent prisoners" Reich leaders desired to hold as hostages for bargaining purposes at the end of the war. Three of the seventy-six men made it home to England.²²

On April 6 the prisoners in Stalag Luft III were told about the death of the fifty escapers. Their attitude toward escape was never the same again. The prisoners were numbed by the news of the deaths and took the camp administrators at their word when they said that the Luftwaffe could no longer ensure the prisoners' safety once they were outside the wire and that the men must now realize that escape was "no longer a game." News of the Normandy invasion, in turn, caused the prisoners to hope that Germany would soon be defeated. In light of these developments, many prisoners adopted more conversative

²²Brickhill, The Great Escape, 172-223; Smith, Mission Escape, 137-235



THE AIR FINE USED IN THE GREAT ESCAPE TUNNEL.

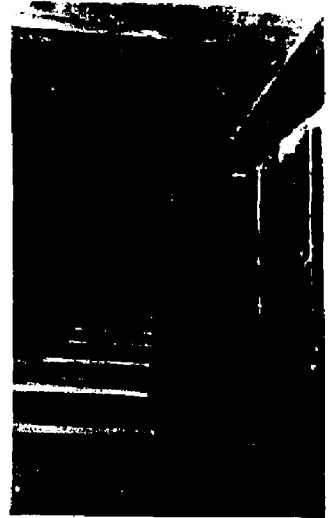


A MEMBER OF THE GREAT ESCAPE TUNNEL.

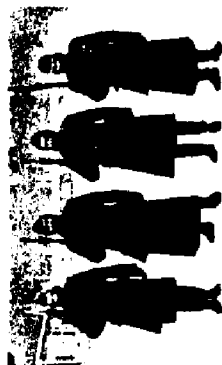


DEATH AT TUNNEL ENDING THE GREAT ESCAPE TUNNEL.

THE SUBJECT OF THE AIR FINE AGAINST THE GREAT ESCAPE TUNNEL.



A MEMBER OF THE GREAT ESCAPE TUNNEL.



THE SUBJECT OF THE AIR FINE AGAINST THE GREAT ESCAPE TUNNEL.



A MEMBER OF THE GREAT ESCAPE TUNNEL.

attitudes toward escape and questioned whether the possible rewards were worth the added and perhaps unnecessary risks. In August 1944 General Vanaman spread the word that he would not order the men to give up further attempts at escape, but cautioned them about the futility of their efforts. Finally, in October, the British received word from London that escape was no longer considered a duty, and shortly thereafter the Americans received the same information.

Not all activity ceased, however. In most of the compounds preparations for escape continued in terms of making escape aids and preparing tunnels. The British in North Compound began yet another tunnel in June 1944, named George, from the theater. It was never opened, but was reserved instead for possible use in the event it became necessary to execute one of the contingency plans mentioned earlier. The escape aids were constructed largely for the same purpose and for possible use in the event the prisoners were marched westward, a move which they correctly anticipated would offer them numerous opportunities to slip away.²³ The importance of this work became increasingly clear to the prisoners in the fall and winter months of 1944-1945 as they watched conditions in Germany deteriorate and pondered what might lie ahead of them in the closing months of the war.

²³Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part III; "A History of Stalag Luft III," Part III, 32; Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part III (Diary), August 23, 1944.

CHAPTER XIII

FROM EVACUATION TO REPATRIATION

Introduction

News of the Normandy invasion altered the expectations and hopes of Allied prisoners of war throughout Germany. Those who were detained in Western Germany felt assured that they would be home within weeks or months. The prisoners housed deep within German-held territory were aware that they could not expect an early release, but clung to the hope that Germany's collapse could not be far away and that they would be home at least by Christmas. As the months went by and the prisoners noted the slowness with which the Allied armies on both the western and eastern fronts were progressing, their outlook of excited anticipation gradually gave way to feelings of increasing anxiety and apprehension.

The prisoners in Stalag Luft III remained in captivity almost a year after the invasion, but they occupied the camp at Sagan only a portion of that time. By January 1945, just when they could hear the sound of Russian guns and were convinced that liberation was finally at hand, the Germans moved the prisoners out of the camp and started them on a forced march westward. As they embarked on the march, the history of Stalag Luft III came to a close. The facilities

were left to the local populace and to the retreating and advancing armies. The history of Stalag Luft III would be incomplete, however, without some account being given of the disposition of the men who put so much life into the camp's otherwise sterile facilities. Nor could any assessment of the camp and the German prisoner of war system be made without noting the experiences, conditions, and circumstances encountered by the prisoners in those final months of the war, for much of the good that the Germans had accomplished at Stalag Luft III became obscured amidst the bitter memories and lasting impressions created by the suffering and hardships inflicted upon the prisoners between the time of their evacuation from Sagan and their liberation by the Allied armies.

The Last Days of Stalag Luft III

After months of anxious waiting, the prisoners saw clear evidence in mid-January 1945 that their stay in Stalag Luft III was about to end. At 1500 hours on January 17, the German news broadcast announced unprecedented Russian advances towards the camp. That same day news arrived that new shipments of Red Cross food parcels had arrived from Lubeck. In light of these two developments, the senior officers decided it was time to put the prisoners back on full rations (for the first time in four and one-half months) so that they might "fatten up" and be "ready for any eventuality."¹

¹Thomas E. Mulligan, Lyman B. Burbank, and Robert R. Brunn, "History of Center Compound, Stalag Luft III, Sagan Germany" (unpublished manuscript, 1945), Part III (Diary), January 17, 1945 [Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Maxwell AFB, Alabama]. Hereinafter cited as "History of Center Compound."

The news had an electrifying effect upon the men and gave them much to think about. They had heard reports that prisoner of war camps farther to the East already had been evacuated and that the evacuations had taken place on very short notice. Clearly they had to step up the pace of their own preparations. For some time the men had been making extra trips around the circuit in an effort to get in better physical condition for a possible forced march. Now they began to prepare bedrolls and build various containers to transport their few personal belongings and supplies.

For a few days the camp seemed to be in limbo. Prisoners tried to carry on with their normal activities in the theater and in the skating rinks, but their attention was glued to events outside the camp. More and more refugees were seen passing the camp, as well as in Sagan. Stalag Luft III was on the combat air route to the Eastern front, and the men gazed up frequently to see flights of German FW-190s, ME-109s, JU-88s, JU-52s, HE-111s, HE-117s, ME-120s, ME-140s, and the new ME-263 jet fighter.

The prisoners also watched the German camp personnel closely for indications of how they were reacting to the impending crisis. Some of the Germans manifested an increased willingness to curry favor with the prisoners. Most of them, however, acted calmly and told the prisoners that their preparations for a march were "foolish and over-cautious." They also told the prisoners in Center Compound that the prisoners in the other compounds were not making preparations, when in fact they were all doing so. Understandably, the Germans wanted to confiscate all the bedrolls, but finally consented, in Center Compound at least, to let the prisoners sign a parole that the

materials would not be used for escape; the kitbags then were stored in the Block Commander's Room in each barrack. In at least one instance a German chided the prisoners for their preparations and then showed them a better method of packing their goods. The men reviewed their contingency plans to ensure that adequate provisions had been made for the distribution of medics, engineers, and camp leaders among the marching ranks and that everyone concerned knew what he was to do in the event the German staff should desert or attempt to liquidate them.²

Tensions among the prisoners mounted as the Russians drew nearer. On January 25 the men learned that a Russian spearhead had reached the Oder at Steinau, only forty-eight miles due East of Stalag Luft III.³ All the Germans and prisoners could do, however, was wait and try to carry on as usual. The Germans demonstrated their calmness by conducting a routine search of Barrack

²Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part III (Diary), January 17-25, 1945; Charles G. Goodrich, "History of the USAAF, Prisoners of War of the South Compound, Stalag Luft III" (unpublished manuscript, 1945), Part II [Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Maxwell AFB, Alabama], hereinafter cited as "History of Center Compound;" Bob Neary, Stalag Luft III: Sagan...Nuernberg...Moosburg. A Collection of German Prison Camp Sketches with Descriptive Text Based on Personal Experience (North Wales, Pa.: by the author, 1946), 26, hereinafter cited as Stalag Luft III: Sagan; Aidan Crawley, Escape from Germany: A History of R.A.F. Escapes during the War (New York: Simon Schuster, 1946), 215-17, hereinafter cited as Escape.

³At this point the records left by the prisoners begin to reflect the state of confusion that undoubtedly prevailed in the camp, and dates, times, and distances vary depending upon which source is used. Fortunately, the discrepancies are generally insignificant and thus little attempt is made here to reconcile the differences, the emphasis instead being placed upon the general trend that can be deciphered from the documents. Examples of the kinds of discrepancies that are being overlooked here can be seen in the Center Compound diary which states in one place (January 25, 1945 entry) that the

Center Compound. The prisoners in Center and West Compounds enjoyed a hockey match on the afternoon of January 26. That night the men attended performances in the compound theaters. It now appeared that the time had passed when any reasonable attempt could be made to evacuate prisoners, and this belief was seemingly confirmed when an order from Berlin was received by the Kommandant on Saturday morning, January 27, stating that the prisoners were not to be moved.

That evening the order was countermanded, and all the compounds were informed about seven o'clock that the prisoners were to leave that same night. The prisoners in North Compound were rehearsing The Wind and the Rain when suddenly the curtains were drawn and the adjutant called out, "All pack up and be ready to move out in an hour's time." A similar scene occurred in East Compound where the adjutant looked in the door of the theater and announced "I'd be moving if I were you. We leave at 11:00 P.M."⁴ The prisoners in South Compound were enjoying the play You Can't Take it With You when Colonel Goodrich ascended onto the stage and reportedly proclaimed, "The goons have just come and given us thirty minutes to be at the front gate."⁵

bedrolls were kept in the block commanders' rooms and in another place (Part IV) that they were held in the Red Cross Parcels Store. Another discrepancy is that one source puts the Russians forty-eight miles from Sagan on January 25 (January 25 entry) while a different account (again in Part IV of the "History of Center Compound") places them only thirty-eight miles away already on January 23. Neither of these discrepancies is important when one considers the obvious fact that the approach of the Russians and the concessions made by Germans are well accounted for in each of the respective documentary sources.

⁴Crawley, Escape, 219.

⁵John Toland, The Last 100 Days (New York: Random House, Bantam edition, 1970), 19.

A mad rush ensued, accompanied by much delay and confusion. Some of the turmoil perhaps arose from prisoners who felt a delaying action might allow the Russians to overtake the columns before they had traveled far from camp; other prisoners simply had much to do in the final minutes before their departure. Bedrolls had to be repacked after final determinations had been made on precisely what food was available. Cupboards were cleaned out and what could not be carried was quickly "bashed" in an effort to consume as much food of a high nutritional value as possible. Also, care was taken to destroy anything and everything that might be of value to the Germans. The incinerators were soon alight and piles of old clothes, furniture and other items went into the flames. Somehow an entire barracks in North Compound went up in smoke. Not until eleven o'clock that night did the last man from South Compound clear the gate.

The remaining compounds departed at various times throughout the night and the next day. West Compound left at 12:30 A.M., North Compound cleared the camp by 3:45 A.M., Center Compound followed immediately upon its heels, and East Compound pulled up the rear at about 6:00 Sunday morning. The prisoners in Belaria did not leave their compound until late that evening.⁶

⁶Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part II; Neary, Stalag Luft III: Sagan, 26; Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part IV; Crawley, Escape, 220-21. See Delmar T. Spivey, "History of Center Compound" (unpublished manuscript, 1946), 170 [Spivey Collection, Special Collections Room, USAF Academy Library, Colorado], hereinafter cited as "History," for a different order of march that places Center Compound at the end of the line. This account agrees that the prisoners in Center began passing through the gate at 3:30 A.M., however, and from this fact it can be deduced that Center was not the last to leave in view of other evidence indicating that East Compound left at 6:00 and Belaria later that same day, all of

In spite of their best efforts the prisoners had to leave much behind. All the musical and sports equipment remained, most of which was collected in a day or two by Y.M.C.A. personnel who were still working out of their headquarters in Sagan. Varying estimates suggest that between twenty-five and fifty-five thousand Red Cross food parcels were left behind. The senior officers had gained permission at the last minute to allow each prisoner to pass by the Red Cross store and take choice items from the packages and most of the men gathered up additional cigarettes, chocolate, and other goods that were valued for barter or extra nutrition. After the prisoners departed thousands upon thousands of food cans littered the area around the Red Cross stores and down the road where the prisoners discarded items in order to lighten their load. One report claims that approximately one million books were left behind and that over two and one-half million cigarettes remained in East and North Compounds alone.⁷

Approximately five hundred prisoners were too sick to be moved and stayed behind when the others embarked upon their journey. A few medical personnel, clergymen, and healthy prisoners also remained to help care for the sick and wounded. These men received very little help from the Germans, but managed to find plenty to eat and drink by

which is supported by the arrival times of the various compounds at points along the route of travel as outlined below. The best explanation for this discrepancy is that part of East Compound passed Center during one of the latter's layovers and that the other half of the men from East Compound later joined the prisoners from Belaria who traveled a somewhat different route, thus placing Center Compound at the end of the columns by the time they entrained at Spremberg.

⁷Crawley, Escape, 220; Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part IV.

scrounging through the various compounds. Finally, on February 6, 1945, they too were removed from the camp, placed inside boxcars, and transported westward to a camp outside Nuremburg where on February 10 they rejoined the prisoners from West Compound who had arrived shortly before.⁸ With the departure of the sick and wounded, Stalag Luft III ceased to exist as a Luftwaffe prisoner of war camp. What happened to the facilities is not known. At least one prisoner returned to the scene immediately after the war in an effort to locate certain documents and the carefully hidden copies of the Kriegsgeklarion. He found the camp still standing but could not locate any of the items he sought. At some later date the camp was torn down. Today all one sees on the site is an open field with a monument built by the Polish government in memory of the men who died in the complex of prisoner of war camps in the vicinity of Sagan.⁹

The March

The death of the camp did not mark the end of the prisoners' travail. Snow had begun to fall several days before the march commenced

⁸Full details on the experience of the men in the "hospital party" are found in Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," in a section placed near the end of the document and titled "The Evacuation of the Hospital Party from Sagan and the Period Before the Evacuation," hereinafter cited as "The Evacuation of the Hospital Party."

⁹Interview with Arthur Dreyer, February 25, 1976. Dreyer names one Major Eggen as the man who revisited the site immediately after the war. Eggen is now deceased. For comments on the monument see Toland, The Last 100 Days, 663. A picture of the monument is found in a pamphlet depicting war monuments throughout Poland located in General Clark's Collection [Special Collections Room, USAF Academy Library, Colorado].

and about six inches had accumulated on the ground by the time the men left the camp. In some ways the snow was a blessing. Taking advantage of the few hours of waiting between the time the first and last compounds passed through the gates, many prisoners were able to build sleds upon which to carry their possessions. In some cases the sleds consisted of nothing more than an overturned bench with runners attached, but however makeshift they might have been, the sleds proved to be a boon for the overburdened men. The low temperatures that accompanied the snow was another matter. Varying estimates place the temperature on the night the march began at anywhere from ten degrees below zero to twenty degrees above zero (the latter perhaps being the more accurate figure) and ranging up to ten to twenty degrees above zero the next day.¹⁰ Snow began to fall during the night and with the wind created blizzard conditions at times.¹¹ For a brief period the prisoners retained a festive spirit, born out of the exhilarating realization that they were at last free of the wire. The harsh weather soon took its toll upon the physically weakened men, however, and before long the columns began to stretch out as exhausted men fell farther and farther behind. The prisoners generally

¹⁰Crawley, Escape, 221; Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part IV, "Evacuation of the Hospital Party"; Interview with Albert P. Clark, March 22, 1976.

¹¹The trying conditions encountered by the prisoners on the march are vividly portrayed in a novel written after the war by one of the participants, Joe Klaas. His book, Maybe I'm Dead (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), exemplifies the prisoners' tendency to exaggerate just a bit (he places the temperature on the first night of the march at forty degrees below zero), but the work is well worth reading because of the author's skill in relating the prisoners' moods and the intangible fears and hardships which they endured on the march

believed that stragglers would be shot, and rumors spread quickly whenever shooting was heard in the vicinity of the marchers. There is no proof that anyone was shot during the early stages of the march, however, and in all likelihood no one was since the guards themselves were mostly older men in worse physical condition than the prisoners. Further evidence that the stragglers were not harmed is found in the fact that some of the exhausted marchers were returned to Stalag Luft III where they joined the members of the sick party still held in the camp, while others were picked up later by search parties sent back along the route after the columns stopped to rest. Many men were found along the road where they had fallen, exhausted and half frozen but otherwise unharmed.¹²

The prisoners realized that the march provided ample opportunities for escape but only a few of them took advantage of the situation because of an order received over BBC radio requesting the men to stay together for safety and ease of identification. Two compounds, South and Belaria, did not receive the message banning escape, however, and prisoners from these two groups did escape. Colonel Goodrich felt there was no advantage to escaping in central Germany in the winter and ordered the men of South Compound not to escape even though at times they carried the rifles of some of the exhausted guards. When their group arrived in the vicinity of Munich near the Swiss border, interest in escape increased, and before the train on which they were riding pulled into Moosburg, the station near their final destination,

¹²Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part IV, "Evacuation of the Hospital Party;" Grawley, Escape, 222-23.

the prisoners were given permission to escape and thirty-two men successfully jumped out of the boxcars. The escapers were physically exhausted before they left the train, however, and this fact, combined with their lack of knowledge of the terrain and the local populace, explains their uniform lack of success; everyone of them was captured within five days and sent to Moosburg where they rejoined their fellow prisoners.¹³ Fifteen prisoners from Belaria Compound also escaped, but information is not available concerning their fate.¹⁴

Knowing that escape was not a practical alternative, the prisoners had little choice but to suffer through the hardships of the march. It soon became clear to them that the Germans had made little or no provision for their care on the journey. A few wagon loads of bread were sent along with several of the columns, but the prisoners ate mostly the food they carried on their backs. Some additional food and water were obtained through barter from the German people along the way. The prisoners generally received kind and considerate treatment from the people they met, but not from the isolated groups of SS men who crossed the prisoners' path from time to time and berated the people for associating with the Luftgangsters.

The men in South Compound seem to have suffered the most on the march. The prisoners blamed the German officer in command of their

¹³ Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part III.

¹⁴ Albert A. Kadler, "Special Report on Conditions During the Forced March of American and British Prisoners of War from Their Former Camps to Stalag III A, Luckenwalde," n.d., File No. 383.6-15, SHAEF 1-6 ["Transfer of Allied Prisoners of War from Central Germany"], Record Group 331.

group, and he may well have abused the men. It is also possible that he was under a great deal of pressure from higher authorities to keep South Compound moving. As the lead column, it had to travel long distances with only brief rest stops in order to make room for the succeeding groups, all of which might have been overtaken on the march by the advancing Russian forces if they had not moved rapidly. Russian guns could still be heard in the distance for some time after the men got on the road, and with the columns stretching out some twenty miles from front to back, there undoubtedly was concern over the progress of the leading compound.¹⁵ The Geneva Convention specifies that prisoners of war are not to be moved on foot more than twenty kilometers a day.¹⁶ The men in South Compound marched fifty-five kilometers in the first twenty-seven hours with one one four-hour stop for rest. At 2:20 A.M., January 29, they reached Muskau where they found quarters in a brick factory and a heating plant. The factory's furnances were white hot and the prisoners reveled in the warmth. The facility also had running water and those who were still physically able rapidly cooked warm food and washed themselves. About fifteen per cent of the men could not walk without assistance and in the coming days many more became ill from exposure and exhaustion.¹⁷

All the compounds but Belaria followed the same route from Sagan to Spremburg where the men boarded trains and traveled in different directions. South Compound remained in the lead but

¹⁵Crawley, Escape, 222.

¹⁶Article 7.

¹⁷Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part III.

experienced a somewhat easier trek over the final twenty-five kilometers from Muskau to Spremburg. West Compound came next and covered twenty-eight kilometers in eleven hours. After a brief stop during which the prisoners took two-hour turns getting warm in some concentration camp buildings, the column moved on at about 6:00 P.M. During the early morning hours of January 29 exhausted groups began leaving the line for shelter in barns and roadside inns. After varying periods of time, the men resumed the march under their own direction and continued toward Muskau where they found the same brick factory used by the South Compound prisoners. The prisoners demanded extra time to rest and recuperate next to the heated furnaces. The factory soon became a jumble of humanity. South Compound received a thirty-hour rest there and was thus still present when the men arrived from West Compound, who in turn stayed there two days.¹⁸ The prisoners from West Compound then covered the remaining twenty-five kilometers to Spremburg in two more days, stopping overnight in some barns near Graustein.

North Compound, which at this time contained five hundred Americans, covered the distance in three stages. On the first day they marched thirty-three kilometers, on the second day less than thirty kilometers, and then after a three-day rest at Muskau, walked the remaining twenty-five kilometers to Spremburg in company with half of the prisoners from East Compound who had caught up with them at Muskau. The complete disorganization that prevailed throughout

¹⁸Neary, Stalag Luft III: Sagan, 27; Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part III.

the march is revealed in the problems faced by the North Compound prisoners. Anticipating a rest at Halbau, the first logical stopping point along the way, the prisoners learned upon arrival there that they were to billet at Friedwaldau, seven kilometers farther on. When this village was reached at about noon, it was discovered that the only billets available were two small halls capable of holding three hundred and fifty men each. The German officer in charge of the Compound left the men waiting in the street while he went to look for more accommodations. After about an hour, during which time the prisoners' wet clothing began to freeze solid, some prisoners began to look for shelter themselves. The local populace offered to let them come into their houses, but within minutes shouts echoed down the village streets, and members of the SS and local police force came to each house and ordered the prisoners out onto the road. The whole column then had to march an additional seven kilometers to the village of Leippla, where it was rumored that a large barn was available. Once there, they discovered that the barn would hold at the most six hundred men. As many as possible were crowded in and the rest of the column was halted on the road. There they waited for the next four hours while the Germans tried to find more accommodations. The temperature on this second night of the march reportedly dipped below zero. Most of the Germans gave up the search before long and retired for the night, leaving the prisoners in the cold. One German, however, Hermann Glimnitz, who had been with the prisoners since the early days at Barth, continued to look for quarters and eventually got all the men under a roof with the exception of fifty prisoners who slept on straw in the leeward side of a farmyard wall. The march was

resumed at 8:00 the next morning and ended that evening in Muskau. The brick factory was still occupied by other prisoners, so the men from North Compound stayed in a riding school, the stables of a palace, a laundry, a pottery, and a section of a French prisoner of war camp five kilometers outside the town.¹⁹

The prisoners in Center and East Compounds encountered about the same difficulties as the others. General Vanaman walked the entire distance at the head of Center Compound's column. The prisoners from Center found refuge in Halbau (the town where North originally thought it would stop for the day), but the church and attached buildings they occupied were so small that virtually no one got any rest that night. The next day they marched seventeen kilometers to the small village of Barrau. The prisoners rested at Barrau on January 30, and then went on to Muskau, where they stayed until February 3. That day they marched to Graustein and stayed the night in barns. On February 4, the eighth day of their journey, the prisoners from Center Compound completed the trip to Spremburg where, like all the others, they boarded trains for destinations unknown.²⁰

Beginning at Muskau and later at Spremburg, the prisoners were divided into groups and sent in different directions.²¹ The

¹⁹Crawley, Escape, 228-30.

²⁰For detailed accounts of the journey made by the men in Center Compound, see Spivey, "History," 167-184, and Mulligan, et. al., "History of Center Compound," Part IV.

²¹At Muskau the five hundred American prisoners from North Compound joined one of the all-American compounds and traveled with them to Spremburg. The men from East Compound were divided into two groups at Muskau, half of them going with North Compound toward Spremburg while the other half remained behind and joined with Belaria Compound which followed twenty-four hours later. Crawley, Escape, 234-36.

Americans were sent in two directions, with West Compound going to Stalag XIII D outside Nuremburg, and South and Center Compounds to Stalag VII A near Moosburg, which was situated some fifteen kilometers north of Munich. The British also were sent in several different directions. The prisoners from North Compound (and those from East who had joined them) went to Marlag and Milag Nord, a camp near Tarmstedt originally used to house naval prisoners and Merchant Marine internees. The prisoners from Belaria Compound and the men from East Compound who joined the Belaria contingent went to Luckenwalde, a large camp situated about twenty miles southwest of Berlin.²²

The train rides, like the marches on foot, entailed hardships and dangers. Forty to fifty men plus several guards were crowded into each boxcar, which meant that only a few of the men at a time could lie down. Many men were sick by this time and vomit and human excrement accumulated on the floors. For long periods of time the prisoners received no water and were allowed no opportunities to prepare food or relieve themselves. And as throughout the march, the men were dangerously exposed to attacks by Allied aircraft. There is no proof that any of the columns from Stalag Luft III were attacked while on foot or in the trains in January and February, but these men were fired upon by Allied aircraft later in the spring. Reports of strafing attacks circulated frequently among the men, and on numerous occasions they passed through or near areas that were being

²²Details of the British movements are given in Crawley, Escape, 237-281. Only the experiences of the Americans are recounted below.

heavily bombed. The boxcars seldom carried proper markings identifying the passengers as prisoners. Adding to their worries, the prisoners were never told where they were being sent and some suspected the Germans might place them in the centers of large cities in an effort to discourage further Allied bombings.²³

Numerous affidavits relating to the hardships encountered on the march were taken from prisoners after the war by members of the Judge Advocate General's Office seeking to establish evidence for use in the war crimes trials.²⁴ The prisoners also registered

²³Such a plan actually did exist. The plan called for the establishment of camps for British and American Air Force prisoners to be placed in the centers of towns and had been proposed, no less, by the Operations Staff of the Luftwaffe. Jodl approved the measure on behalf of the General Staff of the High Command. Keitel wrote only two words on the first page of the document—"No objections"—and added his initials. International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg, Trial of the Major Criminals before the International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg, 14 November, 1945-1 October, 1946 (Nuremberg, Germany; Secretariat of the International Military Tribunal, 1948) VII, 114-15. This would have been a grave violation of Article 9 of the Geneva Convention which reads in part: "No prisoner may, at any time, be sent into a region where he might be exposed to the fire of the combat zone, nor used to give protection from bombardment to certain points or certain regions by his presence." Berger claims that he never saw the order, but states that Goebbels had repeatedly asked that British and American Air Force prisoners be placed in cities where they would serve as "living air defense," but that he, Berger, joined forces with Albert Speer and that the two of them convinced Reich leaders that sufficient barbed wire could not be found to prepare such camps and that adequate guard forces were no longer available to guard the prisoners in the cities. Transcript of discussion between Delmar T. Spivey, Helmut Haubold, and Gottlob Berger, April 16-17, 1968, 10-11, Berger Folder, Spivey Collection. Hereinafter cited as "Berger Interview Transcript."

²⁴See Entry No. 321b, Record Group 153, Records of the Judge Advocate General's Office, Washington National Record Center, Suitland, Maryland, for samples of individual affidavits testifying to apparent violations of the Geneva Convention pertaining to the treatment of prisoners of war.

numerous complaints with the Protecting Power during the war. The prisoners charged individual Germans, as well as the German prisoner of war system as a whole, with gross violations of the Geneva Convention. Especially noted were instances in which they had to march in inclement weather over distances exceeding the twenty kilometer limitation without adequate food, water, rest, or shelter. They also noted the many times they had been exposed to hostile fire without even so much as the minimal precautions having been taken to identify the columns of marching men or the boxcars in which they later rode as being filled with prisoners of war. The widespread agreement exhibited in the prisoners' reports to the Judge Advocate Generals' Office and the Protecting Power clearly show that they suffered severe hardships and abuses during the final months of the war. The difficulty in this case, however, of singling out and passing judgment on the Germans is aptly pointed out in a perceptive report made by a SHAEF staff officer:

While the Annex to the Hague Convention, and the Geneva Convention prescribe certain rules as to the treatment of prisoners such as treating them humanely, avoiding exposing them to fire in a combat zone, evacuating them at stages of not more than 20 kilometers a day and supplying them a food ration equal in quantity and quality to that of troops at base camps, there is no indication as to the duty of the detaining power when these conditions cannot be met. There is nothing that requires the detaining power to offer the prisoners a choice of (1) being overrun by the forces of their own or Allied Nations or (2) of undergoing severe forced marches with inadequate food and shelter.

The problems facing SHAEF personnel in their efforts to help alleviate the prisoners' plight also were clearly seen. The same report continues:

Chaotic conditions in Germany due to the Russian advance and Allied air assaults were undoubtedly the main cause of the violations although there is some indication of willful refusal to better their condition. At this stage of the proceedings, while a protest would be proper, it is extremely doubtful if it would be effective particularly in view of the great mass of crimes awaiting investigation and action. Nor would it be advisable to speculate as to the effect of retaliation against German prisoners of war since this would only produce greater hardships against our own personnel in German hands.²⁵

Realizing that the Allies could be of most help to the prisoners by approaching the Germans in a spirit of cooperation and compromise was a step in the right direction. The real problem remained, however, of determining exactly what kinds of aid were most needed by the prisoners and how it might be sent to them.

Provisions for Emergency Relief

SHAEF personnel responsible for looking after the interests of Allied prisoners in German hands began already in early 1944 to lay contingency plans for the care of the prisoners in the final months of the war and after Germany's collapse. Little concrete work could be done, however, until indications emerged as to what actions Germany might take in regard to the prisoners as the end drew near. Throughout January and February 1945 the Allies watched the prisoners' migration and sought ways to alleviate their plight. They realized that the men needed food and medical supplies, and set to work with representatives of the International Red Cross to see what could be done to get

²⁵C. S. Bushman, Lt. Colonel, Inf., Asst. G-1 in Memorandum to Colonel Brooks, April 2, 1945, File No. 383.6-15, SHAEF 1-6 ["Transfer of Allied Prisoners of War from Eastern Germany"], Record Group 331 [Modern Military Branch, National Archives].

these items to the prisoners while they were en route and after they had arrived at their destinations. It soon became obvious to the planners that nothing short of drastic emergency measures could save the prisoners from large scale suffering, death, and disease.²⁶ One report indicated that as of February 26, 1945, three broad migration routes had emerged. About 100,000 prisoners made up the northern line of march, all moving westward along the northern coast of Germany. Approximately 60,000 prisoners comprised the central line of march. These men also were moving westward in an area delimited by Berlin, Dresden, and Leipzig. The third group consisted of about 80,000 men, most of whom were moving westward along a line stretching from the Sudetenland through the towns of Boehmisch Leipa, Koeniggratz, Gitschen, and Teplitz Schonau, where the prisoners were being assembled and split into two groups, one of which was proceeding to Karlsbad and the other to Marienbad and thence to Nuremburg, Stuttgart, and Munich.²⁷

²⁶For detailed accounts of the contingency plans and the factors which affected their formation, see the following items located in the Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Maxwell AFB, Alabama: USSTAF, "Information on current problems confronting the AAF in the ETO, 1944-45 [concerning] the protecting, evacuation, relief, and maintenance of U.S. and British prisoners of war after cessation of hostilities (tab 9), File No. 519.979; USSTAF, ECLIPSE Memorandum No. 8: The care and evacuation of prisoners of war in Greater Germany under ECLIPSE conditions, May 19, 1945, File No. 519.961-3, 13; USSTAF, Folder of miscellaneous post hostilities planning data for treatment and evacuation of POWs, January-March 1945, File No. 519.9731-13; USSTAF, Minutes and notes of planning meetings and Conferences on supply, protection and evacuation of Allied Prisoners of War, PW Section on file, November 1944-May 1945, File No. 519.9731-3.

²⁷Mr. Harrison, American Delegation, Bern, to Ambassador Fullerton, February 28, 1945, File No. 383.6-15, SHAEF 1-6, Record Group 331.

On February 24 SHAEF announced that an agreement had been concluded (apparently with representatives of the International Red Cross in Geneva) for transporting supplies for the prisoners from Switzerland into Germany by truck, and that the first convoy was scheduled to cross the border the next day.²⁸ The trucks did not, in fact, begin to cross the border until March 6, but thereafter a steady stream of supplies was sent into Germany on a fleet of two hundred specially marked trucks and several trains operating out of Geneva in the South and Lubeck in the North.²⁹

The delay may have occurred for several reasons. The shipment of emergency relief supplies amounted to a gigantic undertaking and the pure mechanics of the operation may simply have taken longer than originally planned. Another possible reason is that, although arrangements had been completed between SHAEF and the International Red Cross, some doubt still existed as to whether the Germans would grant safe passage for the shipments. As the British Secretary of State for War pointed out in the House of Commons on February 27, 1945,

. . . it is impossible to make anything effective without the agreement of the German authorities I would . . . just like to say that the assumption in some quarters that the only thing necessary to solve the problem

²⁸Mr. Caffery to Secretary of State, Washington, February 24, 1945, File No. 740.00114EW/2-2445 ["Prisoners of War-European War, 1939"], Record Group 59 [Diplomatic Branch, National Archives].

²⁹Resume of Report by Dr. Rossel, March 17, 1945 concerning the First Emergency Relief Motor Convoy, File No. 383.6/6, SHAEF G-1 ["Supplies for POWs"], Record Group 331 [Modern Military Branch, National Archives].

is for the United Nations to place at the disposal of the International Red Cross Committee large numbers of lorries or railway wagons, together with large quantities of petrol, oil and so on . . . has no foundation. It is no use piling up lorries and railway wagons at Geneva if there is no outlet into Germany for them.³⁰

It is not known precisely when the Germans did agree to let the convoys enter Germany, but at some point prior to March 6 assurances concerning their safety must have been obtained since the vehicles did travel into Germany after that date and receive safe passage.

Secret Mission to Berlin

The prisoners had no way of knowing about the extensive relief effort and became increasingly concerned about their survival. Some of the men from Stalag Luft III felt they had one factor in their favor, however—the presence of a brigadier general within their ranks. They assumed that General Vanaman could gain concessions from the Germans which would be denied to lower ranking prisoners, and it was a comfort to the rank and file merely to know that he was with them on the march.

Many questions arose, therefore, when suddenly at Spremburg General Vanaman, along with Colonel Spivey and three other officers, were removed from the columns and sent to Berlin. Conflicting stories circulated among the prisoners both then and later concerning the reasons for their departure. The official word put out by the Germans

³⁰ Transcript of message transmitted by American Ambassador in London, John G. Winnant, to the American Secretary of State, Washington, February 27, 1945, File No. 740.00114EW/2-2745, Record Group 59.

was that these men were being taken to Berlin in preparation for their early repatriation because of the fine work they had done in conducting the march in an orderly and efficient manner. This explanation put the members of the repatriation party in an awkward position. Because of the instructions from home which directed the prisoners to remain together and not escape, the prisoners had in fact conducted themselves well, the unfortunate outcome in this case being that their actions made the German story about early repatriation for the general and the others seem plausible. Colonel Spivey wanted very much to stay with his men, as did General Vanaman, but the Germans left them no choice. They had to go and had to put out the official word as to why they were leaving.

General Vanaman, however, had some concrete reasons, unknown to the other prisoners at the time, for agreeing to the German "cover story" about repatriation. Ever since his capture, he had felt that the Germans would try to use him in some manner. Vanaman was convinced the promise of repatriation was a cover for the Germans to get him to Berlin where they could use him to their advantage. But the trip to Berlin offered as many opportunities for him as it did for the Germans, for he felt that the decisions affecting the prisoners were still being made in Berlin, and that he could influence some of those decisions if he was in the area where they were being made. What would happen to him and the other men in the repatriation party when they got to Berlin was anybody's guess. Whatever it was, they all felt quite sure they were not being sent for repatriation; for the rest, they simply had to wait and see.³¹

³¹Interview with Arthur W. Vanaman, April 2-3, 1973. More

The route followed by the repatriation party took them north to the bombed out city of Berlin and then back south about twenty miles to Luckenwalde, the same camp to which some of the prisoners from East Compound and all of the men from Belaria were being sent. As Vanaman's party had feared would be the case, nobody at Luckenwalde knew anything about plans for their repatriation. They waited two weeks before receiving any indication of what might happen to them in the future.

One day a young German captain, Helmut Bauer, walked in, introduced himself as a member of General Berger's staff, and asked if there was anything he could do to help them. Vanaman felt this might be the opportunity he had been hoping for, and asked if it might be possible for him to travel to Switzerland to make arrangements with United States government representatives to secure trucks to transport the food being held in Switzerland to the various camps in Germany. Vanaman promised that after accomplishing his mission, he would return to Germany and remain in prisoner of war status.

In a few days, Dr. Bauer returned with news that General Berger had approved General Vanaman's trip. Unfortunately, the trip had to be cancelled because of "difficulties" Berger was having with Goebbels and Bormann. The crux of the matter was that Berger had special plans for Vanaman which he had revealed to only a very few

detailed accounts of the experiences of the men in the repatriation party are found in Spivey, "History," 184-244 and Delmar T. Spivey and Arthur A. Durand, "Secret Missin to Berlin," Air Force Magazine, 58 (Spetember 1975), 115-120. The information presented in this section is derived from the interview with Vanaman and the two written sources noted above.

men in the German hierarchy. Goebbels, Bormann, and Himmler were not among them. At the suggestion of a member of his staff, Dr. Helmut Haubold, and in keeping with his interest in providing humane treatment for the prisoners, Berger had agreed to hold a medical conference in Berlin designed to help alleviate some of the worst problems facing the prisoners under his control. Berger insisted, however, that Vanaman, as the highest ranking prisoner, be present so that the medical personnel from the various camps would take the conference seriously and not dismiss it as a mere Nazi propaganda scheme. Pending the convening of the conference, Berger felt it was necessary to keep Vanaman's presence in the area a closely guarded secret because of fears that Bormann, Goebbels, and Himmler would otherwise try to get control of him and use him for their own needs. Berger thus cancelled the plans for Vanaman's trip to Switzerland and instead, with the help of his staff, worked directly with International Red Cross and Protecting Power representatives in an effort to have the supplies stored in Switzerland brought into Germany in specially marked trucks.

The medical conference was convened on March 28, 1945. A great deal was accomplished at the meeting including, among other things, the making of arrangements for pooling the remaining medical supplies which were then to be dispersed in part by two teams of doctors. One team, comprised of an American physician and one German doctor, was given the task of visiting prisoner of war camps throughout southern Germany for the purpose of putting down epidemics. The second team, composed of a British doctor and a German doctor, was assigned the same mission regarding camps in northern Germany.

After the conference the doctors went back to their respective

camps, but General Vanaman and Colonel Spivey remained in Berlin upon orders of General Berger, who had still further plans for them. He summoned both men to his headquarters on the outskirts of Berlin and asked them if they would carry special radio codes for him to the Allied armies so that clandestine communications could be established between himself and General Eisenhower. Berger wanted to negotiate a separate peace with the West so that the remaining German forces could concentrate all their strength upon the advancing Russian armies. He was prepared to circumvent Hitler, Himmler, and all the rest of the Nazi hierarchy in order to save the Fatherland. Berger certainly was not alone in thinking that such a plan would work, for it is widely known that other Reich leaders were putting out separate secret peace feelers. What makes Berger's attempt interesting is that he chose to call upon one of the prisoners under his control to serve as his emissary, and that the prisoner stipulated in turn that he would carry the codes to Switzerland only if Berger promised to continue his efforts to get supplies to the men and to do his utmost to stop the movement of prisoners. The meeting between Vanaman, Spivey, and Berger did not take place until the night of April 3, so one cannot be sure that Vanaman's stipulations to Berger were responsible for the arrival of the specially marked Red Cross trucks in Germany beginning on March 6, 1945. It is quite possible, however, that it was Berger who granted the all-important safe conduct passages for the convoys, without which Allied authorities would not have allowed the trucks to enter Germany, and that he was motivated to do so, at least in part, by the knowledge that if he later wanted the messages carried by Vanaman to be accepted by the Americans and British, he

would have to do something rather spectacular to establish his credibility in the eyes of the Western Allies. What better way to exhibit his sincere desire to cooperate with them than to assure the safety and well-being of the prisoners about whom they had expressed so much concern!³²

Berger arranged for Vanaman and Spivey to be smuggled out of the country and into Switzerland. Because of circumstances beyond Berger's control, however, the two men did not cross the border until April 23, 1945. The war was almost over and little attention was paid to the codes, though Vanaman was put on a special plane and flown to Washington where he made a full report to American authorities. In the meantime, much had happened to the other prisoners from Stalag Luft III, all of whom were anxiously awaiting the day of liberation.

The Last Days in Captivity

When the prisoners arrived at their destinations after the march, they found deplorable conditions all around them. As might be expected, all of the camps were exceedingly crowded, and were becoming more so every day. Sanitation in the camps deteriorated rapidly and, in spite of the Germans' best efforts, latrines overflowed and garbage

³²Admittedly, this line of reasoning involves much speculation. It should be added here, however, that Berger himself openly claimed after the war that he was the party responsible for arranging for the shipments inside Germany. In lengthy interviews with General Spivey, Berger listed a number of things he did to safeguard the prisoners' interests as the end of the war approached and asserted that documents existed somewhere in German archives to support his claims. Since the war, pieces of evidence, some of which are outlined below, have emerged which substantiate his statements. See "Berger Interview Transcript," passim.

accumulated faster than it could be carried away. The danger of epidemics arose once again, only this time there was little the prisoners could do to help themselves. The absence of adequate rations throughout the march and during the long weeks before the emergency supplies arrived sapped the men's health and strength. Many had become ill and were flat on their backs by the time the first parcels were delivered.

The prisoners at Nuremburg found it necessary to send a long list of complaints to the Protecting Power on March 13, 1945. The most serious violation of the Geneva Convention pertained to the charge that the camp was situated within three kilometers of a major military target, a large railroad choke point and marshalling yard. During the three-week period prior to the submission of the report the target had been bombed repeatedly, and numerous bombs had fallen in close proximity to the camp. The report also noted that the prisoners had been placed on a starvation diet of approximately thirteen hundred calories per day, and that the dehydrated vegetables were consistently wormy. Crowded conditions plus the absence of fuel for the stoves had increased the prisoners' susceptibility to disease, especially influenza and pneumonia. At the time, 1,159 men had no beds and were sleeping on cold, damp floors. The palliasses that were available were vermin ridden. Rats, mice, lice, bedbugs, and fleas were present throughout the camp, and no adequate disinfectants or anti-vermin powders had been distributed. No space was available for educational or entertainment purposes, and even space for calisthenics was lacking. The report ended with a proposal that the prisoners sign paroles and then be allowed to undertake another march of no more than twenty

kilometers a day until they reached Switzerland, where they would remain interned until the end of the war. In the event this proposal was not acceptable to the Germans, the prisoners offered a second plan which called for them to march to another camp where adequate facilities existed and where Red Cross parcels could be more easily obtained.³³

When the Allied armies began to approach Nuremburg, the Germans accepted the prisoners' second offer. On April 4, 1945, the prisoners from Stalag Luft III who had been transferred to Nuremburg set out on the road once again, this time in the direction of Moosburg where the other Americans had been sent. The weather was much warmer this time, however, and other notable differences existed between this march and the one that marked the departure from Sagan, as can be seen from the entries 2nd Lt. George W. Wenthe made in his daily log:

4 April: 10:00 A.M. Left Nurnberg—nearly 10,000 men. Marched 25 KM to a small village. Arrived at 9:30 P.M. Slept in barn. Saw American fighters during day, bombing and strafing—two kriegies killed.

5 April: Up early and cooked breakfast. Civilians very hospitable. A small boy showed us an American and British flag he had for use soon. All think the war soon over. Marched 3 KM to Neumarkt. At 10:00 A.M. watched 100's of bombers and fighters hit Nurnburg. Later heard 147 American kriegies killed, 2000 Russ-Serbs, and 40 goons. Our camp was leveled—lucky so far. Had first goon issue [of] brot & soup at 1:00 P.M. Marched on. Saw some bombed

³³Darr H. Alkire, Senior American Officer, Nuremburg (Langwesser) Germany, March 13, 1945, concerning "Complaints Respecting Conditions of Captivity," as found in Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Annex III, "Protecting Power File."

areas in Neumarkt. Kriegles starting to straggle, also goons. Start of complete disorder of march. Moved on 18 KM to Berching—after spending afternoon in woods south of Neumarkt. Rained all the way. Arrived at 3:00 A.M. and was bedded in a Catholic church. Slept near altar. Very tired feet and wounded leg

6 April: Up early and started bargaining with civilians. Soap & cigarettes for brot & eggs-whatever else we could get. Had first fresh eggs in over a year. At 10:00 A.M. we assembled. Got 1/2 Red Cross parcel and 1/2 loaf of bread. Left the town (very old and picturesque) and started to straggle—too difficult to keep up. Walked about 5 KM and dropped off to side to cook. Four of us made a big pot of oatmeal and eggs in a driving rain. Good eating. Left the spot at 5 P.M. and walked 7 KM to Paulustrin, still raining. Funniest sight, an old goon walking as if on 1st leg. Unteroffizier asked Bill Dunlap and I to walk slow with him & watch over him. We went up a long hill and some of us carried his gun. What a war! Stopped in town and told a housewife we were ill, asked for a bed. She gave us a room all to ourselves. Plenty of straw, hot water, fire, potatoes and brot. Ate, dried our clothes and went to bed.

7 April: Slept until 9 A.M. Made breakfast and roamed about town Col Jenkins—friend from the hospital in Paris in charge said ok to stay on. At noon, Pappy Yochim & Fran Flynn came by and we moved them in. Ate again and built a deluxe kriegle pie, 15" x 10" x 3" for 4 men. The Frauen were astounded upon tasting same. This plus salmon potato loaf stalled us out. We now had the run of the house, guards living next to us—we helped them cook. Chatted a bit and then to bed again. Rumors aplenty. Kriegle stories astounding—a movie of this would be priceless.³⁴

³⁴Daily Log of George W. Wenthe, copy in the author's possession. Original held by owner.

Not all of the prisoners were having such a relaxed time of it. When the men from Nuremburg arrived at Moosburg outside Munich, they found conditions similar to those they had just left behind. On April 9 the prisoners from South Compound had transferred into the same area as that occupied by Center Compound. Five large tents had been erected, but these proved insufficient and prisoners slept outside all over the ground. Crude lean-to shelters also were hastily constructed, giving the area the appearance of a hobo village. The four hundred prisoners that lived in each of the barracks (which were only a little larger than those at Sagan) obtained their water from one faucet and one hand pump. Again, sanitation measures were totally inadequate.

Interest in escape was keen at Moosburg in spite of the fact that the war was rapidly drawing to a close. Escape could no longer be considered important in terms of the war effort, but there were other reasons that prisoners wanted to escape. The most obvious reason was the close proximity of the Swiss border and the Allied forces. The second reason was that escape was relatively easy. Moosburg served as the mother camp for numerous small work camps which were poorly guarded. The work camps contained French, Serbian, Russian, British, American, and Italian personnel, and these men, together with the thousands of foreign workers who were scattered throughout the area, were willing to help the fliers escape. Contact with the foreign workers was established through the prisoners in the labor camps and contact with these men, in turn, was maintained through the Man of Confidence (the enlisted men's equivalent of the Senior Officer) of the nationality group in Moosburg. The officers



TOP LEFT AND TOP RIGHT:
SCENES FROM THE MARCH
WESTWARD

BOTTOM LEFT: MAKESHIFT SHELTERS
AT MOOSBURG

PHOTOS COURTESY U.S. AIR FORCE
ACADEMY LIBRARY

FIGURE 16

soon found that the best way to get out of the camp was to sneak into the enlisted men's compounds and then go with them on one of their work details and later break away and establish contact with friendly workers in the area. Another method was to make "identity switches" with enlisted men who entered the officers compound for one reason or another. The enlisted men were only too happy to make the switch and enjoy the better living conditions available to the officers. At least sixteen officers made identity switches. On two different occasions two officers walked out of the compound with the aid of a key the prisoners made for the front gate. A tunnel also was started to facilitate passage between the officers and enlisted men's compounds, but it was never completed. Finally, near the end of the war, members of the German garrison expressed a willingness to aid Americans to escape and to accompany them. Several officers availed themselves of such opportunities, most of whom hid out in the town of Moosburg until the American forces arrived. The primary reason for getting out of the camp at that late date was to avoid any fighting that might occur in the event a die-hard group of Germans refused to surrender the camp.

There was yet another reason that impelled the prisoners to think about escape during the last hectic days of the war. The prisoners had frequently heard rumors that Hitler intended to send a group of captives into the Redoubt area of southern Germany where they were to be held as hostages for better truce terms. One day around mid-April the prisoners from Stalag Luft III and an unknown number of other men now confined at Moosburg were ordered to prepare for a march into the Redoubt. The prisoners were naturally very upset at the

prospect of being removed once again from the path of the liberating armies and consulted among themselves as to what measures they might take under the circumstances. The senior officers concluded that everyone should abide by the order and hope that Allied forces would intervene before the men reached the Redoubt. That night the prisoners heard a news broadcast on their intelligence radio from Luxemburg stating that the Allies had reached an agreement with Germany stipulating that no more German captives would be removed from the continent in return for German assurances that no more Allied prisoners would be moved from their present locations. The next morning the prisoners confronted their German escorts with this information and they in turn queried higher authorities and discovered that the report was true.³⁵

It is not known whether Vanaman's request to Berger influenced the decision to halt the further movement of prisoners. What is known is that Berger was very much involved in the Redoubt operation, and that recent findings clearly demonstrate that he was a true friend of the prisoners and that he definitely knew how to influence important persons within the Reich to achieve the ends he desired. In support of his argument that Eva Braun had much more influence upon Hitler than is generally believed, Glenn Infield noted:

When, late in the war, Hitler decided to use thirty-five thousand prisoners of war as hostages, it was Eva who saved them. Hitler had instructed General Gottlob Berger of the Waffen-SS to take the hostages to the mountains south of Munich and hold them there until he could obtain a satisfactory

³⁵Interview with Albert P. Clark, March 22, 1976; Goodrich, "History of South Compound," Part III.

truce from the Allies. If he was unsuccessful the prisoners were to be executed. Eva learned that Berger opposed the plan, that even if ordered he would not kill the prisoners. She decided that it would be best if Hitler gave the signed orders to Berger rather than to some other officer who would carry out the Fuhrer's command. She and Berger, both convinced that such executions were morally wrong, entered into an agreement. She arranged for him to have an appointment with Hitler, and while Hitler was discussing the matter with the general, Eva brought the typed orders pertaining to the executions into the room and handed them to the Fuhrer. He immediately and automatically signed them and Berger left the room with the documents in his possession. Both he and Eva knew that he could stall off Hitler until the war ended without carrying out a single execution, and that is exactly what happened.³⁶

Infield's point about Eva is well taken, but the information he presents also gives a favorable image of Berger.

Once more the prisoners breathed a sigh of relief. They knew now that liberation was only a matter of time. Within days of the threatened removal to the Redoubt the sound of gunfire could again be heard, and by the last week in April everyone knew the end had to come soon. Early Sunday morning, April 29, the prisoners awoke and heard shooting just over the hill from camp. Authorities in the Allied army were already trying to get the German personnel to surrender the camp and surrounding areas peacefully. The prisoners were just walking away from an open-air church service when small arms fire sounded close to the camp. A few bullets whistled into the camp and all but a few designated prisoners took cover and awaited the end of the brief battle. Two or three men had been assigned the task of using the cameras obtained for intelligence work to photograph

³⁶Glenn B. Infield, Eva and Adolf (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1974), 194.

scenes from the battle, and these men posted themselves outside the wire. Because of their willingness to venture into the combat zone and risk their lives after waiting so long for the day of liberation, the prisoners were able to bring home with them excellent pictures of one of the most important moments in their lives.

Allied forces secured the camp and raised the American and British flags over the camp. General Patton then entered through the gates and shared in the emotional turmoil exhibited by the newly liberated prisoners. He and his forces then moved on to other objectives. The prisoners rejoiced in their new freedom, tore down the wires around the camp, and walked out into the open fields to look around and stretch their legs. To them the remaining days before they could be transported home seemed like an eternity. General Eisenhower repeatedly had issued orders instructing the men to "stay put" so as not to create confusion within the Allied lines. A few of the prisoners could not restrain themselves and hitchhiked their way to Paris and elsewhere. Most of the men obeyed their superiors, however, and proceeded in due time to the embarkation port at La Havre, where the majority of them were placed on board ships and sent home.

In the years since their liberation most of the prisoners have taken time to reflect upon their experiences as prisoners. They have drawn a variety of conclusions about the days they spent behind barbed wire. Some have come to view their stay in captivity as a loss of their best years, while others have concluded that it marked one of the most productive and spiritually enriching periods of their lives. The most prevalent sentiment among the prisoners both then and now,



THE IRGUN MEMBERS AND THEIR CAPTAINS
IN TRANSIT TO THE ARAB LIT
CONFERENCES IN THE ALLEGE



THE IRGUN MEMBERS AND THEIR CAPTAINS
IN TRANSIT TO THE ARAB LIT
CONFERENCES IN THE ALLEGE



THE IRGUN MEMBERS WELCOME THE
LUNARATING NURSES AND DRUGS
OVER THE FENCE

THE IRGUN MEMBERS WELCOME THE
LUNARATING NURSES AND DRUGS
OVER THE FENCE



THE IRGUN MEMBERS WELCOME THE
LUNARATING NURSES AND DRUGS
OVER THE FENCE



THE AMERICAN FLAG IS RAISED
OVER THE FENCE AT THE MOMENT
OF LUNARATING



THE AMERICAN FLAG IS RAISED
OVER THE FENCE AT THE MOMENT
OF LUNARATING

however, reflects a renewed appreciation for the country to which they returned, and is aptly expressed in the words of Bob Neary:

I had never fully realized before going overseas just how wonderful this country of ours is. I had always taken for granted my complete liberty, freedom of speech and countless luxuries that I considered my heritage as an American My year and a day of oppression and want in prison camp have changed my perspective completely.

I think I have learned my lesson well and feel that I shall never forget it . . . I am an American! And I am grateful.³⁷

³⁷Neary, Stalag Luft III: Sagan, 52.

CONCLUSION

For years after the end of World War II, several hundred former prisoners from Stalag Luft III met each spring to celebrate the anniversary of their liberation. As time went by, the participants found it expedient to hold the reunions every five years rather than annually, but the decision by no means reflected a lessening of interest in the meetings. Since 1960 attendance at the reunions has steadily increased, as has the public stature of many of those who took time off from their busy schedule to gather with their former comrades to swap war stories and share memories of the days they spent together as fellow "Kriegies." The 1960 guest list included Brigadier General Melvin McNickle (later promoted to Major General), Major General John D. Stevenson, General Jacob Smart, Major General Robert M. Stillman, Major General Albert P. Clark (later promoted to Lieutenant General), Major General Delmar T. Spivey, and Major General Richard Klocko.

The most notable reunion, however, took place in Dayton, Ohio, in 1965 when the prisoners created a nationwide stir by inviting as their special guests four of their former German captors: Gustav Simoleit, Camp Adjutant; Hermann Glimnitz, chief ferret; Wilhelm Stranghoner, chief NCO in Center Compound; and Dr. Helmut Haubold, the member of General Berger's staff who arranged the medical conference held in Berlin in March 1945. General Spivey saw nothing strange

in the prisoners hosting the Germans on an all-expense paid trip to America. "We cannot help but give the German Luftwaffe credit for the fairly good treatment we received," he said.¹ Most of the prisoners from Stalag Luft III found themselves in agreement with this statement.

The presence of the Germans in this country evoked a different response among prisoners from other camps. A former Army NCO wrote a letter to General Spivey on May 8, 1965, which deserves to be quoted at length:

In reaction to the newspaper account today which quotes you as saying that you were fairly well treated at Stalag Luft 3, I must say that my experience was quite different: we were packed 96 in a 40 & 8 [boxcar designed to carry 40 men or 8 horses] for 72 hours at one stretch, 86 for 48 hours, with no food or water, and without the doors even being opened. We were marched for days without food and finally arrived at Stalag IVB in pitiable condition.

Men who worked on Kommando [work parties outside the main camps] returned (when too sick to work) to see their bodies for the first time in months when taking a shower, and would break down and cry at what they saw of themselves. I went from 135 pounds to 95 pounds in four months of imprisonment. All we were given to eat was a cup of soup and a piece of ersatz bread each day. This was a systematic [method of] brutality to keep us dependent on the next meal and too weak to try to escape, for the number of guards was small. There was enough food, as we discovered, in towns, warehouses, etc., when we broke out. We found the remains of Red Cross parcels in some houses.

I had frozen feet, jaundice, fleas, lice, dysentary, two foot infections, and general malnutrition.

¹As quoted in a newspaper clipping taken from the Mexico City Times, April 24, 1965, enclosed in "Lists & Miscellaneous Correspondence-POW" Folder, Spivey Collection [Special Collections Room, USAF Academy Library, Colorado].

Our stomachs were . . . swollen . . . and some died We had no sexual potency It is not that I want us to continue hating Germans, but that so often officers and Air Force men had better treatment by the Luftwaffe guards than did the enlisted men in the ground forces. We could always spot an air force man in the showers at rest camp; they had buttocks!

I can appreciate that you did receive good treatment at your Stalag, but you are quoted as saying that you think the POW camps were run humanely, in contrast to the concentration camps. The only difference between the concentration camps and the Stalag I was in was that we were not killed off with gas or bullets

In short, General, I do not think you can speak for the rest of the Stalags occupied by the plain dog faces who were POWs. The Luftwaffe had some chivalry; three of our airmen parachuted into our Stalag and were immediately sent to a Luft Stalag. I do not remember one act of mercy or compassion all the while I was a prisoner of war, on the part of the Germans²

General Spivey was not ignorant of the suffering encountered by prisoners held captive by the German army. In fact, it was precisely because he and the other prisoners in Stalag Luft III were aware of the inhumane treatment rendered to almost everyone but Air Force personnel that the men attending the reunion concluded that members of the Luftwaffe should receive special mention and commendation.³

²Confidential letter to Spivey, "Lists & Miscellaneous Correspondence-POW" Folder, Spivey Collection.

³In all fairness to the author of the above letter, however, it should be mentioned that Spivey may have been quoted out of context or may inadvertently have given a reporter the impression that he was equating the treatment provided by the Luftwaffe with that extended by other components of the German prisoner of war system. We find him saying in the Foreword of his 1946 manuscript "There were great numbers who were killed during combat and some were killed by the Germans during or after capture . . . but those who fell into prisoner of war channels were, almost without exception, treated quite decently

In their own way, the Air Force prisoners were addressing the paradox that holds the key to much of Stalag Luft III's history, the influence of Leviathan at a particular time and place where Behemoth seemed to rule supreme.

Leviathan was able to assert her mollifying influence in certain German prisoner of war camps for several reasons. The German prisoner of war system as a whole was directed by a complex and nebulous command structure that permitted diversity in the administration of the camps. Under these circumstances, an influential man like Goering was able not only to secure control of virtually all the airmen who fell into German hands, but also to determine which provisions of the Geneva Convention regarding the treatment of prisoners of war would be observed in the camps which housed the airmen. His decision to abide rather closely to the Geneva Convention in the treatment of Allied airmen seems to have been based in part upon a belief that a common bond existed among airmen of all nationalities and in part upon the fact that the Allies held enough German fliers captive to make retaliation a matter of mutual concern between the Allies and the Germans. At any rate, his stance benefited the captured airmen, if only by making it possible for the lower echelon Luftwaffe personnel who were directly in charge of the camps to

by German military personnel." "History of Center Compound," (unpublished manuscript, 1946), Spivey Collection. If this statement were published as it stands it would undoubtedly give the impression that he was making an unwarranted generalization about the entire German prisoner of war system. Earlier in the Foreword, however, he makes it quite clear that he is speaking primarily about Air Force officers, and not about the other ranks or members of other service branches, a subtle and yet extremely important distinction that may not have been noted in a newspaper article.

execute their duties in accordance with their own sense of duty and professional standards without undue outside interference.

Not enough is known about the other Luftwaffe camps and especially about those which housed primarily airmen of other ranks to warrant any broad generalizations about the performance of the Luftwaffe administrators as a whole. The evidence suggests, however, that the personnel in charge of Stalag Luft III, at least, acquitted themselves quite well, and may in fact have been the greatest single factor in bringing about the relatively satisfactory conditions that prevailed in that camp. Men like von Lindeiner, Simoleit and Glimnitz, to mention only a few, performed their duties in a professional manner and conducted themselves honorably. They were not above bending the rules from time to time if it appeared the prisoners' burdens could be lightened thereby without endangering the Reich. These men seem to have done about as much for the prisoners as one could reasonably expect considering the state of affairs in Germany at the time and the government's insistence that the "Luftgangsters" were already receiving better treatment than they deserved.

The relatively independent position of the Luftwaffe camps in the German prisoner of war system, the decision to abide by the letter if not the spirit of the Geneva Convention (at least in regard to captured fliers of officer rank from the West), and the high degree of professionalism and personal honor exhibited by most members of the German camp staff, all contributed to the prisoners' well-being in Stalag Luft III. These factors in themselves, however, did not serve as the sole source of the camp's lifeblood.

The life and vitality which were so evident throughout the camp

resulted in large part from the efforts of outside agencies and from the prisoners themselves. The prisoners' home governments made it abundantly clear that they were interested in the kind of treatment accorded to their soldiers and that they were willing to work on the basis of reciprocity when it came to determining how German soldiers in Allied hands would be treated. Furthermore, the home governments gave material aid and moral support to the prisoners in Stalag Luft III, and this was important not only because of the scarcity of resources in the camp, but also because it convinced the prisoners of their inherent worth to the Allies and provided reassurances that their governments had not forsaken them. Russian prisoners seldom if ever had this assurance, and one can only guess at the adverse effect this must have had upon their will to survive. Because the home governments exhibited a genuine interest in the prisoners' welfare, the Protecting Power was able to act more effectively on the prisoners' behalf, for the Germans knew that the information gathered and sent out by the Protecting Power received close attention in the United States and the Commonwealth countries. The governments' interests also greatly facilitated the work of the Y.M.C.A. and Red Cross. Without the valuable services of these two organizations, the prisoners in Stalag Luft III might indeed have fared little better than those housed in concentration camps. There is no evidence to suggest that the German government would have "filled the gap," so to speak, and provided the necessary food, educational, recreational, and religious items the prisoners needed to sustain themselves as healthy and productive human beings had these items not been forthcoming from outside agencies. The prisoners were immensely grateful

to the Red Cross and Y.M.C.A., as well as to a host of other groups, for their unstinting support.

The prisoners possessed the means to help themselves and deserve credit for exhibiting the willingness and expending the effort to do so. As a group, they possessed a high degree of native intelligence and benefited from a generally good state of mental and physical health. They could boast a variety of skills and special talents, many of which had been developed through college training and professional attainments prior to capture. Capable leaders emerged from within their ranks and utilized the chain of command to exercise effective control. The senior officers established workable policies that suited the prisoners' particular situations from the early days of the formative years until the end of the war. The decision to pool their resources and share them equally undoubtedly eliminated much divisiveness, as did the decision to transform escape from an individual enterprise into an operational mission with which all prisoners could identify. Good leadership and wise policies contributed, in turn, to the growing sense of community that sprang up among the prisoners. The community spirit served as the fabric of the prisoners' society and accounts in large part for the success they enjoyed in transferring their community functions from one compound to another without serious loss of continuity.

All these factors help to explain how Leviathan was able to exert her influence in Stalag Luft III, but what do they tell us about the camp's place in the full spectrum of prisoner of war affairs? The answer we derive depends on whether we are talking in theoretical or practical terms.

In theoretical terms, the evidence presented in this study suggests that Leviathan failed at least in part in her struggle against Behemoth, for the conditions that prevailed in Stalag Luft III did not measure up to the standards set by the Geneva Convention of 1929. The men in Stalag Luft III suffered from hunger, lived in overcrowded quarters, lacked adequate sanitation facilities, had insufficient clothing and bedding, suffered from barbed wire psychosis, and lacked adequate medical care. They lived in constant fear of what the Gestapo and SS might do to them, were shot at repeatedly while well inside their compounds, and in some cases were murdered in cold blood.

In practical terms, however, Leviathan's influence accomplished about as much as one could reasonably expect. It was not Behemoth alone that Leviathan had to fight in Stalag Luft III. World War II was a total war, and the suffering inflicted upon all its victims was correspondingly severe. Not even the Geneva Convention outlined all the obligations incurred by the detaining power in a total war in which the fighting was destined to continue until the bitter end. Furthermore, the occupants of Stalag Luft III were not always model prisoners. Their adoption of escape as an operational mission distinguished them from prisoners who merely looked upon escape as an individual duty, and the prisoners' espionage practices clearly took them beyond the pale of law.

In the final analysis, what occurred in Stalag Luft III says more about the state of confusion in prisoner of war affairs in modern times than it does about either the Germans or the prisoners. Both parties acted as they did because of forces that are so complex and

changeable as to defy man's best efforts to define and control them. The prisoners in Stalag Luft III were exposed to virtually every hardship and danger that prisoners of war have ever encountered. And the Germans faced the same problems that detaining powers have always faced. The experiences of those who have become prisoners since World War II indicate that mankind has made little progress in the direction of agreeing on the status prisoners should possess and the obligations that detaining powers must incur.

There is still something to be gained by scrutinizing the experiences of these men. Just because man has not yet come to terms with all the implications of wartime captivity is no reason to despair that he will never do so. Studies such as this serve a purpose if they do no more than remind us that we have not yet reached the point where prisoners of war can count on receiving humane treatment, or perhaps even an early parole to prevent the wasting of valuable years of life. If that day should ever come, prisoners would not have to write as did a man from Stalag Luft III who saw his youth and that of his comrades passing away:

The fate we share as prisoners
Is drab and often grim,
Existing on such scanty fare
As Reich-bread, spuds and klim.

Beds and books and little else
To fill Time's flapping sail,
She makes or loses headway all
Depending on the mail

Oh! Drab the days and slow to pass
Within this barbed-wire fence,
When all the joys of living are
Still in the future tense.

So here's to happy days ahead
When you and I are free,
To look back on this interlude
And call it history.⁴

⁴Joe Boyle. By permission of the author.

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MOVIES AND TELEVISION PRODUCTIONS

The Great Escape

Hogan's Heroes

VITA

Arthur Aquinas Durand was born in Spooner, Wisconsin, on June 9, 1944, the son of Elinore and Arthur Durand. After graduation from Horace Mann High School in Spooner, Wisconsin, in 1962, he entered Wisconsin State University, Superior Wisconsin, and received a Bachelor of Arts in June 1966. That same month he was designated a Distinguished ROTC Graduate and granted a commission as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Air Force. He began graduate study in the Department of History at Louisiana State University in June 1966 and received the Master of Arts degree in August 1968. He entered onto active duty in the United States Air Force in October 1967 and served as an intelligence officer in the Vietnam conflict and later at K.I. Sawyer AFB, Michigan. In July 1970 he was assigned to the Department of History at the U.S. Air Force Academy, Colorado, where he served as an instructor until he again entered the Graduate School of Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge in August 1973. He is a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in May 1976.

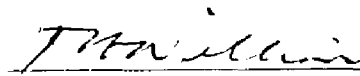
EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

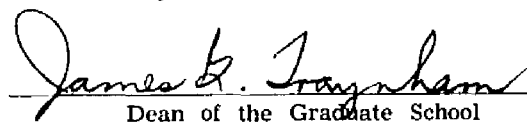
Candidate: Arthur Aquinas Durand

Major Field: History

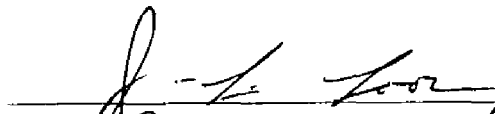
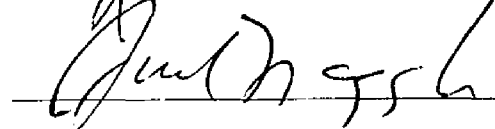
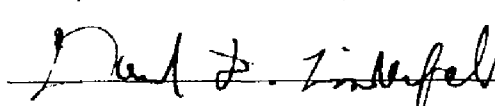

Title of Thesis: STALAG LUFT III: AN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IN A WORLD WAR II
GERMAN PRISONER OF WAR CAMP

Approved:


Major Professor and Chairman


Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Date of Examination:

April 26, 1976

Location of German Camps and Hospitals Where American Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees Are Held

(Based on information received to December 31, 1944).

PRISONER OF WAR CAMPS

CAMP	NEAREST TOWN	MAP SQUARE
Stalag II A	Neubrandenburg	B 2
Stalag II B	Hammerstein	C 1-2
Stalag III A	Luckenwalde	B 2
Stalag III B	Fürstenburg/Oder	C 2
Stalag III C	Altdrewitz	
Stalag III D	Berlin-Steglitz	B 2
Stalag IV A	Hohnstein	3-C 3
Stalag IV B	Mühlberg	B 2
Stalag IV C	Wistritz	B 3
Stalag IV D	Torgau	B 2
Stalag IV D/Z	Annaburg	B 2
Stalag IV F	Hartmannsdorf	B 3
Stalag IV G	Oschatz	B 2
Stalag V A	Ludwigsburg	A-B 3
Stalag V B	Villingen	A 4
Stalag VI G	Bergisch-Neustadt	A 2
Stalag VI J	Krefeld	A 2
Stalag VII A	Moosburg	B 3
Stalag VII B	Memmingen	B 4
Stalag VIII B	Teschen	D 3
Stalag 344	Lamsdorf	C 3
Stalag VII C	Sagan	C 2
Stalag IX B	Bad Orb	A-B 3
Stalag IX C	Rad Sulz	B 2
Stalag X B	Bremervörde	A-B 2
Stalag X C	Nienburg	A 2
Stalag XI A	Altengrabow	B 2
Stalag XI B	Fallingb. Ostel	B 2
Stalag XII A	Limburg	A 3
Stalag XII D	Wahnb. Ostel	A 3
Stalag XII F	Freinheim	A 3
Stalag XIII C	Hammelnburg	B 3
Stalag XIII D	Nürnberg-Langwasser	B 3
Stalag 383	Hohenfels	B 3
Stalag XVII A	Kaisersteinbruch	C 4
Stalag 398	Puppig	B-C 4
Stalag XVIII A	Wolfsberg	C 4
Stalag XVIII C(317)	Markt-Pongau	B-C 4
Stalag 357	Oerbke	A 2
Stalag XX A	Tórun	D 2
Stalag XX B	Marlenburg	D 1
WK 8-BAB 21	Blechhammer	D 3

CAMPS FOR AIRMEN

Luft I	Earth	B 1
Luft III	Sagan	C 2
Luft IV	Grosstychow	C 1
Luft VII	Bankau	C-D 2
Stalag XVII B	Krems/Gneixendorf	C 3
Dulag Luft	Wetzlar	A 3

NAVAL AND MERCHANT MARINE CAMPS

Marlag-Milag	Tarmstedt	A-B 2
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GROUND FORCE OFFICERS' CAMPS

Oflag IV C	Colditz	B 2
Oflag VII B	Elchstatt	B 3
Oflag IX A/H	Spangenburg	B 2
Oflag IX A/Z	Rotenburg	B 2-3







Oflag X B	Nienburg	A 2
Oflag XI (79)	Brunswick	B 2
Oflag 64	Altburgund	C 2

LAZARETTIS (Hospitals)

	MAP	NEAREST TOWN SQUARE
IV A	Res. Laz. Elsterhorst (Hohnstein)	C 3
IV G	Leipzig	B 2
VB	Rottenmunster	A 4
VIC	Res. Laz. Lingen	A 2
VIG	Res. Laz. Gerresheim	A 2
VII A	Freising	B 2-3
IX B	Bad Soden/Salmünster	A 3
IX C	Obermassfeld	B 2-3
IX C	Meiningen	B 3
IX C	Hildburghausen	B 3
X A	Res. Laz. II, Schleswig	B 1
X B	Sandbostel	A-B 2
XIII D	Nürnberg-Langwasser	B 3
XVIII A/Z	Spittal/Drau	B-C 4
	Marine Lazarett Cuxhaven	A 1
	Luftwaffen Lazarett 4/11 Wismar	B 1
	Res. Laz. II Vienna	C 3-4
	Res. Laz. Graz	C 4
	Res. Laz. Billin	B-C 3
	Res. Laz. Wollstein	C 2
	Res. Laz. II Stargard	C 2
	Res. Laz. Schmorkau	C 2
	Res. Laz. Königswartha	C 2
	Res. Laz. Ebelsbach	B 3

CIVILIAN INTERNEE CAMPS

Ilag Biberach	B 4
Ilag Liebenau	B 4
Ilag VII/H Laufen	B 4

Key

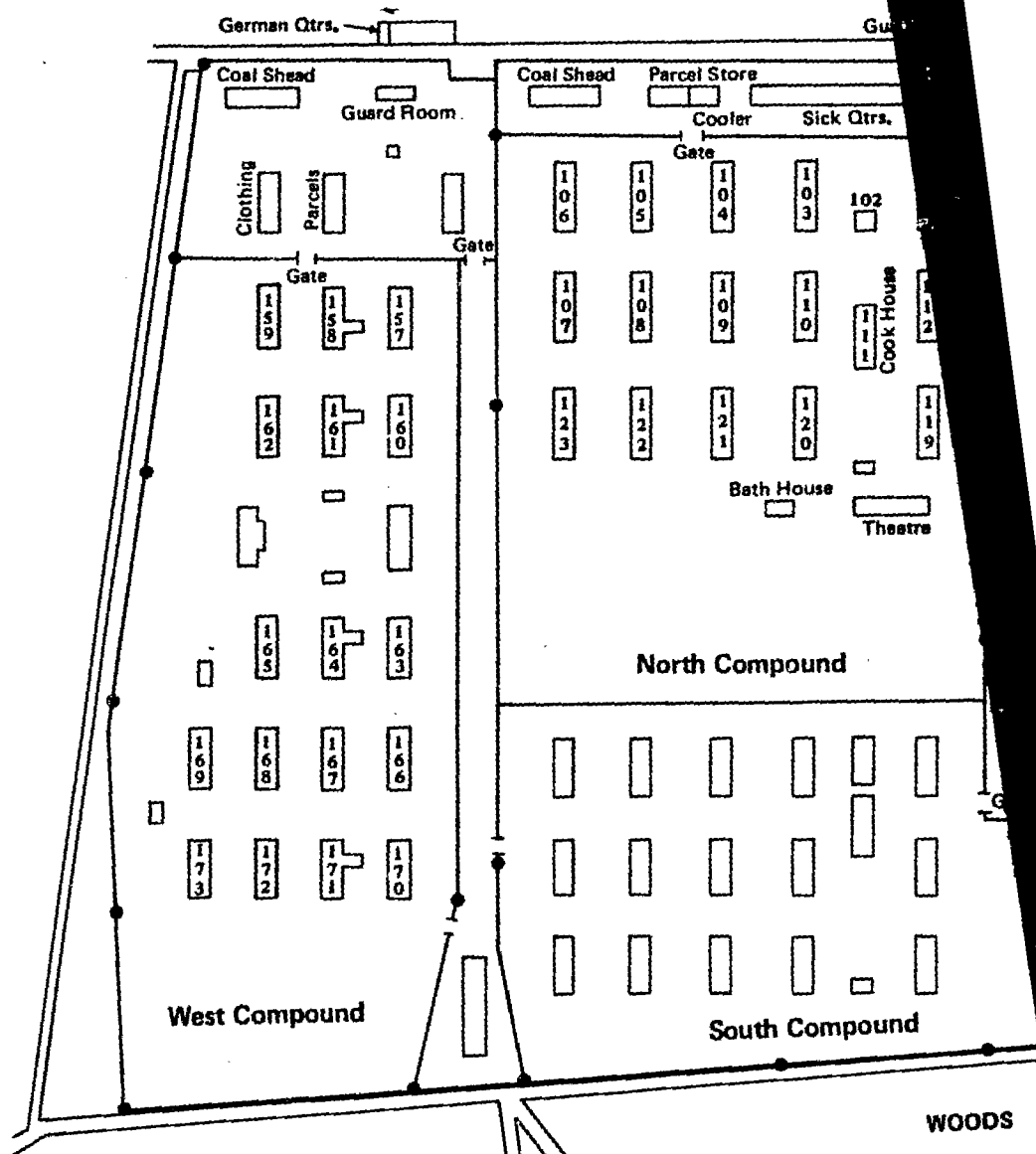
- Prisoner of War Camps
- ⊙ Camps for Airmen
- ⊙ Officer's Camps
- ⊕ Civilian Internee Camps
- ⊕ Hospitals (Lazarettis)
- ⊗ Marlag and Milag

Scale: 72 miles per inch.

Courtesy of American National Red Cross

Figure 2

STALAG L



STALAG LUFT III (SAGAN)

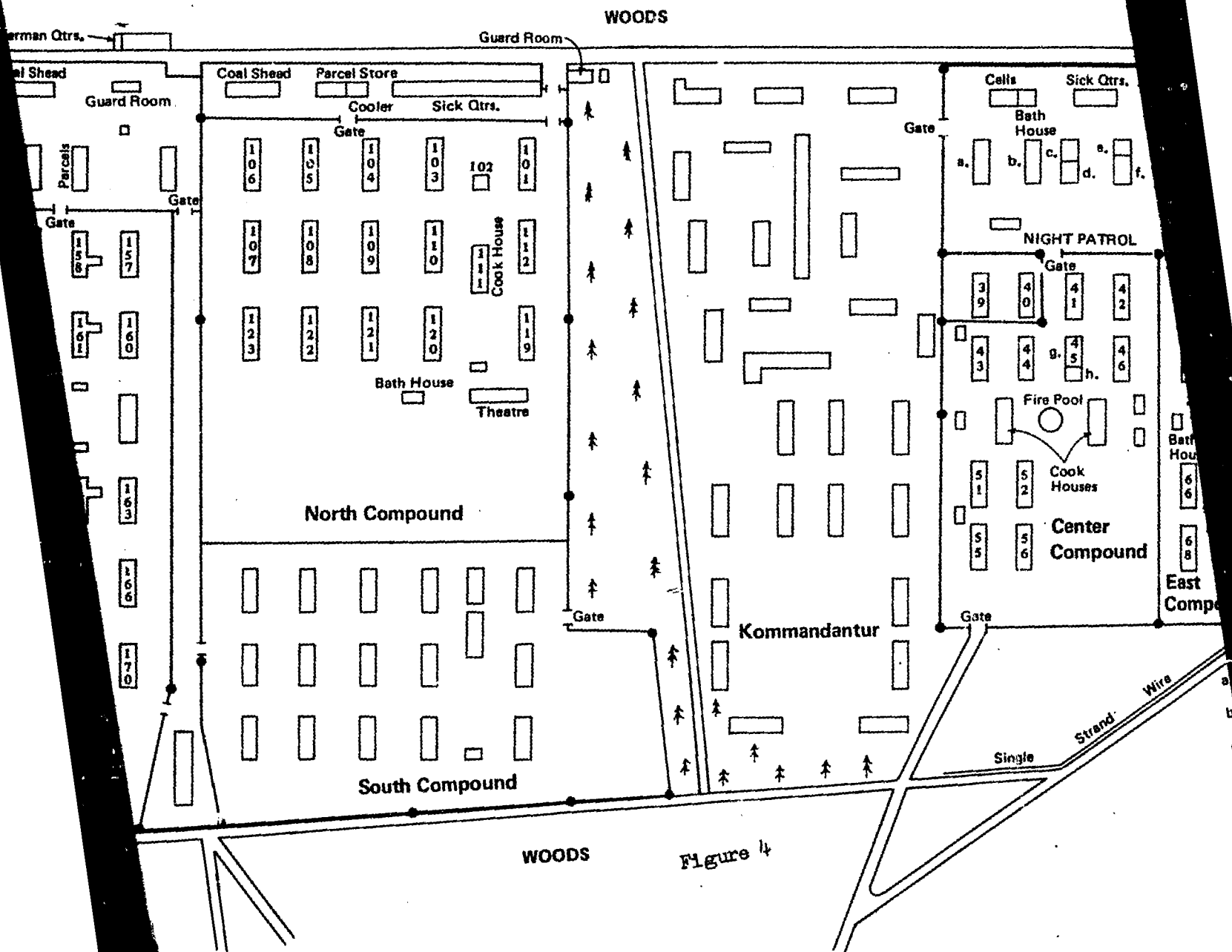


Figure 14

LUFT III (SAGAN)

